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CORNELL STUDIES IN ENGLISH

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XVII

THE POETICS OF ARISTOTLE IN ENGLAND

BY

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PREFACE

The following work is based on my doctoral dissertation, *The History of Aristotle's Poetics in England*, which was completed at Cornell University in 1925 under the direction of Professor Lane Cooper. Professor Cooper has already outlined the subject in chapter 12 of his book, *The Poetics of Aristotle, its Meaning and Influence;* it was at his suggestion that I attempted a more detailed treatment, and his aid and encouragement have enabled me to prepare my book for publication.

PITTSBURGH,
DEC. 1, 1929

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INTRODUCTION

The so-called 'Dark Ages' of European civilization are steadily yielding more and more light to those who have the courage and the patience to penetrate them; but many a dark place still remains. Many a pathway of human thought, laboriously traced from the present backward, leaves us groping before its ancient starting-point is reached. So is it even with our heritage from Aristotle. As we look back to the threshold of the Renaissance, to Dante at the end of the Middle Ages, we see the Stagirite firmly established at the head of the philosophic company as 'the master of those who know.' How he reached that exalted position, and by what ways he came, are questions of moment to students of Western thought. Our concept of Aristotle to-day, where it differs from Dante's, is based on the scholarship of six intervening centuries; Dante's concept largely rests on the devoted scholarship of the thirteenth century; the honorable shade met by him in Limbo is more than the half-legendary figure of 'the Philosopher' conceived by the earlier Middle Ages. To trace this progression—to trace the growing knowledge of Aristotle's writings in Europe—would cast a great light upon the history of our culture. That, obviously, is not the task of a single investigation; the history of one book, in one European country, will, I hope, be taken as an acceptable endeavor to clear a part of the way.

Up to the beginning of the thirteenth century only the logical treatise, the *Organon*—and not all of that—was well-known in Western Europe. Boethius had known more, but even in his time apparently was exceptional. Then, about 1200, the 'New Aristotle' began to arrive by numerous and devious routes, often from Syria through Africa and Moorish Spain, occasionally more directly from the East in the spoils of returning Crusaders,

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who sometimes threw in a manuscript or two with their more material plunder. Soon most of the mediæval wise men came to accept Aristotle as the authority not only on Logic but on all the other arts of the *trivium* and *quadrivium*. Ethics, metaphysics, natural science, mathematics, astronomy, government, language, even theology, fell within his jurisdiction. But we are not to assume that every book in the amazing catalogue of Aristotle's writings, many of which are unknown to-day, was read by Western Europe in the thirteenth century. One important work in particular suffered neglect in the Middle Ages, namely, his treatise on the art of poetry. Though familiar to-day to every student of poetic theory, the *Poetics* was scarcely more than a name from early Christian times to the Renaissance. To most of us who easily discourse on artistic imitation, dramatic unity, *dénouement*, tragic catharsis, and the rest of the Aristotelian requisites, such neglect is hard to understand. Why was so significant a study in literary criticism ignored even in periods when criticism was the fashion? If Alexandrian scholars labored over interpretations of the *Poetics*—and they may well have done so—little evidence of their labor remains. Cicero and Quintilian knew and studied the companion-treatise, the *Rhetoric*, but paid little or no attention to the *Poetics*. In the *Ars Poetica* of Horace there are superficial traces of Greek theory, but these are remote from Aristotle, who, as Cicero tells us, was not popular with the Romans: 'That philosopher [Aristotle] was not known to the rhetorician, inasmuch as he is not much known even to the philosophers, except to a very few.'[1] Boethius (A.D. *c.* 470–525), apparently the last of the Romans who studied Aristotle in the Greek, cherished the hope of translating the Aristotelian writings into Latin; but save for a passage in his commentary on *De Interpretatione*,[2] where he refers to the *Poetics*, we have no evidence that he was interested in Aristotle's critical treatises, or would have included either the *Poetics* or *Rhetoric*

[1] Cicero, *Treatise on Topics* 1.

[2] See Boethius, *Commentarii*, ed. by Meiser, Leipzig, 1880, 2. 6.

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among his translations. Since, for centuries thereafter, scholars were content to rely upon Boethius for their knowledge of 'the Philosopher,' Aristotle as a literary critic, not only before the time of Boethius but long after, was merely a name, and a not very prominent one.

There must be good reasons for such neglect. If we first turn back to Aristotle's own time, we may discover a few of them.

When Aristotle conducted his systematic inquiry into the poetic art, he had before him the finest products of his race. The development of Greek art had already reached its zenith, and the decline had set in. The time was ripe for theoretical reflection, for critical investigation. The chief glory of Periclean poetry was its drama—the tragedies of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, the comedies of Aristophanes; and though Aristotle acknowledged Homer as the great master, it was but natural for him to emphasize dramatic poetry at the expense of other forms, even the epic. Consequently, the most perfect form of Greek drama, tragedy, largely influenced Aristotle's conception of poetic art. Tragedy is the clearest-cut; its structure is the best-defined; its unity is the most apparent; and thus it lends itself most favorably to critical analysis.

Starting with the Platonic conception that a literary form should be a living organism, a perfect whole with beginning, middle, and end, Aristotle readily arrived at his fundamental position that each kind of literature has its distinct form, with its own characteristic activity or function. Therefore, form, or plot, is the soul of poetry. Good plot is most apparent in tragedy, but for Aristotle the principle also held for the epic poem; in the *Poetics* he discusses the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* in the same terms which he applies to *Oedipus Rex* and *Iphigenia in Tauris*, deciding that tragedy, being closer-knit, more unified, is the higher artistic form.

Such a conception is thoroughly Greek, and peculiarly Attic. No one, not even Aristotle, could have written the *Poetics* without the completed Attic culture before him. Aristotle was far

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enough removed from the Periclean age to be able to criticize it, and yet close enough to understand it. Even in his own day the old order was fast changing. Alexander the Great destroyed the city-state, and established an empire; the Romans soon extended man's geographical and political outlook still further; the new Christian religion and new philosophies were destined to upset nearly all the remaining traditions of ancient culture. The close-knit unity of Greek life and art was destroyed, never to be recovered. In a Greek manuscript, or in a Latin imitation, the Roman youth could not see the same heroes the Athenian saw in the Homeric poems. In the hurly-burly of circus and pantomime, the cosmopolitan mobs of Rome could not see the same life and art that the Athenians saw in the Theatre of Dionysus. Furthermore, the early Christian Fathers were prejudiced against the theatre, and usually discouraged both the practice and the study of dramatic art. The barbarian hordes that swept over the Roman Empire increased the confusion of a life that was already too turbulent.

No wonder, then, if Aristotle's critical theories found little acceptance after his death. His *Poetics* and *Rhetoric* were too philosophical for the practical men of the Empire, and too practical for the fine-drawn theories of the professional philosophers. Since Western Europe long neglected the finest masterpieces of Greek literature, it is not strange that a criticism of these masterpieces, even from the hand of 'the Philosopher,' should have failed to come to light.

Nevertheless, Aristotle's great name was too well-known to die, and his ideas were too profound to lose all their significance, even though poetry and philosophy changed along with ways of living and methods of thinking. The main tenets of the *Poetics* were constantly reappearing, modified and mutilated, but usually recognizable. We should have these main tenets well in mind before attempting to trace their varying histories.

Examining the *Poetics* in the light of the best modern interpretations, we find that a dozen doctrines continually crop up in critical theory from the early Renaissance to the twentieth

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century. There are, to be sure, minor points over which scholars have quarreled, and to which we too must occasionally refer; but we shall mainly be concerned with a few important ones. They are as follows:

1. All kinds of poetry are forms of imitation of human action.[1] (Imitation has always been natural and delightful to man. Aristotle thought of imitation as *representation*, idealized, it is true, but not *symbolic*, in the modern sense.)

2. Poetry, being idealized action, is more philosophic and more universal than History.[2] (Here we have included the famous doctrine that a credible impossibility is always better than an unconvincing possibility. Therefore the poet deals with 'the probable.')

3. The ideal poem must have Unity of Action; it must be a perfect organic whole with beginning, middle, and end.[3] (Here we have the familiar Platonic doctrine of the *Phaedrus*, and actually the central achievement of Greek art—the principle of *unity in variety*. Aristotle, in his *Metaphysics* (1078[a]) says: 'The main species [εἴδη] of beauty are order, symmetry, definite limitation.'[4])

4. Tragedy is a dramatic imitation of a great action, serious, complete, with the proper embellishments, effecting a *catharsis* of pity and fear.[5] (Aristotle does not insist upon the representation of tragedy on the stage; the proper effect of a drama may be secured by merely reading it.)

5. Comedy is an imitation of men who are worse than the average—worse as regards the ridiculous (a species of the ugly), but not worse in ways that cause pain or harm.[6] (There is no direct mention of a *comic catharsis* in the *Poetics*, but that there is a proper function of comedy is implied, and later criticisms repeatedly assume that there is a *comic catharsis*.[7])

[1] See *Poetics* 1.1447[a]13–18; cf. 4.1448[b]4–24.
[2] *Ibid.* 8.1451[b]5–26; cf. 18.1456[a]23–5, 24.1460[a]26–7, 25.1461[b]11–12.
[3] *Ibid.* 7.1450[b]21–36.
[4] See Bosanquet, *History of Aesthetic*, p. 33.
[5] See *Poetics* 6.1449[b]24–8.
[6] *Ibid.* 5.1449[a]32–7.
[7] See Lane Cooper, *An Aristotelian Theory of Comedy*, pp. 60–98, 179, 224, 228.

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6. The epic poem has a greater magnitude than tragedy, and affords more opportunity for the marvelous; but tragedy, in addition to possessing the features of Spectacle and Music, is better-knit, more concentrated in its effect, and hence the higher artistic form.[1]

7. The six qualitative parts of Tragedy are Plot, Character, Diction, Thought, Spectacle, and Music.[2]

8. Plot, the 'soul of tragedy,' is the most important element in it.[3] (Complex plots, with complications and *dénouements*, with Peripety and Discovery, are better than simple episodic stories. The perfect plot should have a single issue in tragedy; the double ending—for example, that of the *Odyssey*—belongs rather to comedy.)

9. The ideal tragic personage is mainly virtuous and just, but open to some fatal error in judgment (ἁμαρτία).[4] (This is the source of the famous doctrine of the 'tragic flaw.')

10. Tragedy usually tries to limit the duration of its action within a 'single circuit of the sun.'[5] (Here we have the 'Unity of Time.')

11. The Chorus should be treated as one of the actors.[6]

12. The Spectacle is the least artistic part of tragedy, having least to do with the art of poetry.[7] (The development of theatrical scenery brought on serious controversy over this principle.)

Now we are ready to take up the broken chain of Aristotelian criticism at the end of the Middle Ages. As we are concerned with the history of the *Poetics* in England, we shall avoid emphasis on foreign influences and sources. Nevertheless, since the question of Aristotle's influence upon English writers is inextricably bound up with innumerable intermediate translations, commentaries, and criticisms, Latin, Italian, Dutch, French, and

[1] See *Poetics* 26.1462ª14–18, 1462ᵇ1–15; cf. 24.1460ª11–18.
[2] *Ibid.* 6.1450ª7–15.
[3] *Ibid.* 6.1450ª15, 6.1450ª38–9.
[4] *Ibid.* 12.1453ª7–12.
[5] *Ibid.* 5.1449ᵇ12–14.
[6] *Ibid.* 18.1456ª25–7.
[7] *Ibid.* 6.1450ᵇ16–20.

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German, we must pay some attention to the most important Continental exponents of the *Poetics* such as Julius Caesar Scaliger, Daniel Heinsius, and the even more popular French critics, Corneille, Rapin, and Le Bossu. But our aim will be to find out, as far as is possible and reasonable, who in England has known and used the *Poetics* and the Aristotelian doctrines of poetry, whatever the direct sources of information may have been—Greek text, translation, commentary, criticism, or even hearsay.

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CHAPTER I

THE MIDDLE AGES AND THE RENAISSANCE

The first Englishman to mention Aristotle's *Poetics* was Roger Bacon (*c.* 1214–1294). Like most of his learned contemporaries, Bacon pursued philosophical and scientific studies as means to the greater study of theology. While his primary aim, then, was neither philosophical, scientific (in our sense of the word), nor literary, he fully realized the need for an adequate understanding of the ancient languages and literatures, since they alone, he believed, could furnish the proper tools for more exalted labors.[1] He was convinced that up to his own day Boethius alone, in the West, had fully understood both Greek and Latin.[2] The chief reason for the prevailing ignorance of Bacon's day was the difficulty of obtaining the classical writings, not only in the long-neglected Greek, but in Latin as well. Robert Grosseteste (*c.* 1175–1253), Franciscan scholar and Bishop of Lincoln, had invited Greek teachers to England, and encouraged the study of Aristotle; but himself made little progress in Greek literature.[3] Aristotle's reputation had gone far ahead of his writings. Bacon tells us that there was little opportunity to study the great philosopher:

> Aristotle, as Tully says in the *Topics*, was known to very few. . . . In fact, slowly has any thing of Aristotle's philosophy come into use among the Latins, because his Natural Philosophy

[1] Bacon's humanistic attitude is in strong contrast with that of Giraldus Cambrensis (*c.* 1146–1220) who, though he bemoans the decay of learning in England, regrets the importation of Aristotle's logical treatises from Spain; for he believes they will tend to foster heresy. See Giraldus, *Opera*, ed. by J. S. Brewer, London, 1861–91, 4. 9–10.

[2] See Bacon, in *Opera Inedita*, ed. by J. S. Brewer, London, 1859, pp. 33, 472.

[3] See Bacon, in *Opera Inedita*, p. 33. Grosseteste is said to have prepared a commentary on the *Nicomachean Ethics*. See F. S. Stevenson, *Robert Grosseteste*, London, 1899, p. 248.

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and his Metaphysics, with the commentaries of Averroes and others, have been translated in our own times, and forbidden at Paris before the year A.D. 1237 on account of the eternity of the world and of time, on account of the book on the divination of dreams, which is the third book about sleeping and waking, and on account of many other things erroneously translated. Furthermore, his logical works have been slowly received and read; for the blessed Edmund, Archbishop of Canterbury, first read the book of *Elenchi* in my time, and I have seen Master Hugo who first read the book of *Posteriors* [*Posterior Analytics*], and I have examined the work. So there were but few, considering the multitude of Latins, who were of any account in Aristotle's philosophy; nay, very few indeed, and almost none up to this year of our Lord 1292, which shall be fully and conclusively shown in the following chapters. Still later was the *Ethics* of Aristotle made known, and only lately read by the masters, and then rarely. All the rest of Aristotle's philosophy, in a thousand volumes, in which he treated all the sciences, has not yet been translated or made known to the Latins. Therefore almost nothing worthy is known of the philosophy of Aristotle, and so far there have been but three who have been able truly to judge about the few books already translated.[1]

Bacon probably was one of the three competent judges.

Bacon repeatedly complains of the poor Latin translations of Aristotle's writings, most of them prepared from Arabic texts of Moorish scholars; chief among these, Avicenna and Averroes were largely responsible for reviving the Aristotelian doctrines. Latin translations of Arabic versions, which were more than likely adapted from a Syriac version of the Greek text, were naturally unsatisfactory. Take, for example, the work of Hermannus Alemannus, who journeyed to Spain about the middle of the thirteenth century, and at Toledo in 1256 turned the Arabic version of the *Rhetoric* into Latin.[2] The *Rhetoric* he did complete. The *Poetics* was too much for him; for this he rested content with translating the Arabic commentary of Averroes. Since the German scholar apparently knew little

[1] Bacon, *Compendium Studii Theologiae*, ed. by Rashdall, Aberdeen, 1911, pp. 33–4.
[2] See Jourdain, *Recherches Critiques sur l'Âge et l'Origine des Traductions Latines d'Aristote*, pp. 57, 149–52.

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Arabic, and the Arabic version itself was bad enough, this *Aristotelis Poetria* of Hermannus was too wretched to be of any real influence. Bacon dismisses it with contempt.[1]

There is another mention of the *Poetics* in Bacon, a specific reference in his *Greek Grammar*, where he notes that Aristotle, in his books on the art of poetry, says that syllables and conjunctions are parts of speech, but parts in themselves non-significant. The reference may be traced to *Poetics*, ch. 20, but Bacon takes it from Boethius' Commentary on Aristotle's *De Interpretatione*.[2]

The learned friar was not specially interested in either rhetoric or poetry, and like most mediæval scholars, he regarded them as parts of logic and moral philosophy.[3] Nevertheless he speaks of the need for good translations of those parts of Aristotle's logical works (*Rhetoric* and *Poetics*?) that Hermannus Alemannus had so miserably garbled.[4] Very wisely, therefore, Bacon would have none of the Arabic-Latin translations. He maintained that the efforts of Hermannus Alemannus and William the Fleming, another contemporary student of Aristotle, were worse than useless.[5] In fact, could he have had his way, all the current Latin versions of Aristotle, since their influence was merely to create error and multiply ignorance, would have been burnt.[6]

It is, indeed, hardly possible to exaggerate the ineffectiveness of these Latin versions of the Arabic Aristotle; the *Poetics*, at

[1] See Bacon, *Opus Majus*, ed. by Bridges, Oxford, 1897, 1. 101: 'Sic docuit Aristoteles in libro suo de poetico argumento, quem non ausus fuit interpres Hermannus transferre in Latinum propter metrorum difficultatem, quam non intellexit, ut ipse dicit in prologo commentarii Averrois super illum librum.' Cf. Bacon, *Opera Inedita*, pp. 471–2.

[2] See *The Greek Grammar of Roger Bacon*, ed. by Nolan and Hirsch, Cambridge, 1902, p. 28: 'Unde Aristoteles, in libris de arte poetica, partes locucionis dicit esse sillabas et coniuncciones, sed sillabe in quantum huius nihil significant; coniunccionesvero non per se significant.'

Cf. Boethius, *Commentarii* 2. 6: 'Unde etiam ipse quoque Aristoteles in libris quos de poetica scripsit locutionis partes esse syllabas vel etiam coniunctiones tradidit, quarum syllabae in eo quod sunt syllabae nihil omnino significant, conjunctiones vero consignificare quidem possunt, per se vero nihil designant.'

[3] See Émile Charles, *Roger Bacon*, Paris, 1861, p. 122, note.

[4] See Bacon, *Opus Majus* 1. 101; *Opera Inedita*, pp. 266, 307 ff.

[5] See Bacon, *Opera Inedita*, p. 469.

[6] *Ibid.*

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least, was practically worthless. A mediæval scholar, even a Moor, might arrive at some definite conception of what Aristotle was discussing in the *Rhetoric*; but to such a reader the criticism of Greek drama and epic poetry in the *Poetics* would have been all but incomprehensible. Even the most notable scholars in the thirteenth century showed no more than a perfunctory acquaintance with the two treatises. Roger Bacon, however, was not the only man to recognize the shortcomings of the Arabic-Latin texts. Thomas Aquinas fostered the first mediæval Latin translation of Aristotle direct from the Greek. Some time before 1273 he invited William of Brabant to turn all the Aristotelian writings into Latin. Further, William accepted the invitation, and set to work, translating, among others, the *Rhetoric*;[1] but before he attempted the *Poetics* his industry failed him, or he may not have been able to lay hand on the Greek text. Perhaps it is just as well, for this William of Brabant was none other than William the Fleming whose scholarship Bacon so heartily condemned. On the other hand, William must have done something with the *Rhetoric*. Dante evidently was acquainted with a fairly accurate translation,[2] and probably used the one prepared under the direction of Thomas Aquinas.

We now begin to find a few traces of traditional Aristotelian criticism among the English writers, though the Latin translation of the Arabic commentary on the *Poetics* might just as well have been burnt by Roger Bacon.

Richard de Bury (1287–1345) coupled Aristotle's doctrine of pleasure as activity with the 'profit and delight' of Horace in the *Ars Poetica*, a practice that hundreds later were to follow; but his Aristotelian concept was not derived from the *Poetics*.[3] The morally-philosophic sense was prevalent enough, the aesthetic still dormant.

[1] See Jourdain, p. 71.

[2] See Dante, *Convivio*, trans. by Jackson, Oxford, 1909, p. 154. Cf. Dante, *Epistle 10*, ed. and trans. by Toynbee, Oxford, 1920.

[3] See *The Philobiblon of Richard de Bury*, ed. and trans. by E. C. Thomas, London, 1888, p. 221.

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Chaucer picked up a mediæval definition of tragedy, which probably goes back ultimately to Aristotle, though it is common property in the Middle Ages. For example, one of the glosses in Chaucer's translation of *Boethius* (Book 2, Prose 2) runs as follows: 'Tragedie is to seyn, a ditee of a prosperitee for a tyme, that endeth in wrecchednesse.' There is a similar statement in the Monk's Prologue:

> Tragedie is to seyn a certayn storie,
> As olde bokes maken us memorie,
> Of him that stood in greet prosperitee
> And is y-fallen out of heigh degree
> Into miserie, and endeth wrecchedly.[1]

Chaucer could not read Greek; but could he have seen one of the mediæval Latin versions of the *Poetics*? Probably not. It is extremely doubtful if even the Clerk of Oxenford, with all his passion for Aristotle's books, could have secured a copy of the *Poetics*. It is even more doubtful that his logically trained faculties could have appreciated the book, had he secured it. He might possibly have known of the *Rhetoric*; the catalogue of Oriel College Library lists a commentary on this treatise in 1375,[2] and Ranulf Higden, who died nine years before, mentions Aristotle's Dialogue on Poets and his Tractate on Rhetoric.[3] But the *Poetics* is missing.

[1] Chaucer, *Canterbury Tales*, B 3163–7. Cf. *Poetics* 7. 1451^{a}11–15.

Chaucer's definition is commonplace, but in the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women* (A 511–14) he presents a puzzle to the critics:

> Wel hath she quit me myn affeccioun
> That I have to hir flour, the dayesye!
> No wonder is thogh Iove hir stellifye,
> As telleth Agaton, for hir goodnesse!

It looks as if here we had a reference to Agathon's tragedy, *Antheus*, or 'The Flower,' and the only known source for such a reference is Aristotle's *Poetics* 9.1451^{b}21. Skeat (*Works of Chaucer* 3. xxxiii) has noted the problem. See John W. Hales, *Chaucer's 'Agaton,'* in *Modern Language Quarterly* 1 (1897). 5–8; George Lyman Kittredge, *Chaucer's Lollius*, in *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 28 (1917). 75.

[2] 'Sententie super libros Rhetoricorum Aristotelis secundo folio *omnia* per Cobildik precio.' 'Cobildik' apparently was the donor of the work. See *Collectanea* (First Series), ed. by Fletcher (Oxford Historical Society), 1885, p. 70.

[3] See *Polychronicon Ranulfi Higden*, ed. by Babington and Lumby, London, 1865–86, 3. 360.

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Not until near the end of the fifteenth century did the Greek text of the *Poetics* come to light in Italy; in 1483 Politian owned a manuscript of the work.[1] Printing soon followed. Giorgio Valla brought out an Italian version in 1498; and ten years later appeared the Aldine *editio princeps* of the Greek text, the *Poetics* being included along with the *Rhetoric* in the well-known *Rhetores Graeci*.

Even before this time Englishmen were going to Italy to learn Greek, some of them under Politian himself. The study of the classical languages and literatures, for which Roger Bacon long ago had pleaded, was now firmly established, and the great revival of ancient learning slowly but surely made itself felt not only on the Continent but also in England, there fostered by distinguished scholars such as John Colet, William Graye, Thomas Linacre, William Grocyn, and Bishop Latimer. Perhaps both Linacre and Latimer took part in producing the great Aldine Aristotle in 1495–8.[2] To-day the only perfect set of this famous edition is the one Linacre formerly used.[3] Unfortunately, however, the Aldine Aristotle, for some reason, omitted the *Poetics*, and we have no evidence that Linacre read Politian's manuscript. In fact, it seems unlikely that the projected plan for a Latin translation of Aristotle, by Grocyn, Linacre, and Latimer, took account of the treatise; apparently the only work actually produced was Linacre's translation of the *Meteorologica*.[4]

Englishmen had now taken the first steps. They were rapidly becoming familiar with the great body of classical literature. As early as 1499 Erasmus had noted the remarkable progress of Englishmen in ancient learning. Writing to his friend Robert Fisher in Italy, he enthusiastically exclaims:

I have met with so much kindness and so much learning, not hackneyed and trivial, but deep, accurate, ancient Latin and

[1] Lane Cooper, *The Poetics of Aristotle, its Meaning and Influence*, p. 100.

[2] See P. S. Allen, *Linacre and Latimer in Italy*, in the *English Historical Review* 18 (1903). 514–17.

[3] See Thomas F. Dibdin, *An Introduction to the Greek and Latin Classics* (4th ed.), London, 1827, 1. 313.

[4] See Thomas More, *Opera Omnia*, Frankfort-on-Main, 1689, p. 298; Bale, *Index Britanniae Scriptorum*, ed. by Poole, Oxford, 1902, p. 126, *s.v.* 'Grocin.'

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Greek, that but for the curiosity of seeing it, I do not now so much care for Italy. When I hear my Colet, I seem to be listening to Plato himself. In Grocyn, who does not marvel at such a perfect round of learning? What can be more acute, profound, and delicate than the judgment of Linacre? What has Nature created more sweet, more happy, than the genius of Thomas More? I need not go through the list. It is marvelous how general and abundant is the harvest of ancient learning in this country, to which you ought all the sooner to return.[1]

The study of ancient criticism was bound to follow. If Englishmen did not pick up the *Poetics* abroad, we may be sure that some of the distinguished foreign visitors soon brought it to their attention. Erasmus took part in editing the first 'complete' Greek text of Aristotle, which was printed at Basel in 1531, and included both the *Rhetoric* and *Poetics*, but he betrayed no particular interest in either of them.[2] It was otherwise, however, with the Spanish humanist Vives, who lived in England from 1523 to 1528, lecturing at Oxford, and serving as tutor to Princess Mary. During his stay he made many warm friends among the English scholars, including Sir Thomas More, who had the highest regard for this Spaniard. We can readily imagine that Vives, outside the lecture-room, exerted a very considerable influence upon the intellectual life at More's hospitable house. And Vives knew something about the *Poetics*.[3] We cannot be sure that he ever introduced the doctrines of Aristotle on poetry into familiar conversations with his English fellows, but we shall see that just such doctrines were soon to form the topic for conversation at Cambridge.

[1] Erasmus, *Epistles*, trans. by Francis M. Nichols, London, 1901, 1. 226.

[2] Erasmus merely mentions the two treatises in a letter; see *Epistle 1159* in his *Opera Omnia*, Leyden, 1703.

[3] Vives, *Opera*, Basel 1555, 1. 146: 'In theatris ad publicam exhilarationem exprimebatur hominum vita, velut tabella quadam vel speculo, quae res vehementer delectat propter imitationem sicut Aristoteles ait in *Arte Poetica*. Quippe imitatione, inquit, omnes capiuntur mirifice, et est homo animal maxime imitationi natum, et ea quae in natura sua nollemus cernere, expressa et assimulata nos detinent.' Cf. *Poetics* 4.1448 b 4–24.

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Erasmus' praise to Fisher, enthusiastic and rhetorical as it was, did not exaggerate the progress of England in the New Learning. Roger Ascham went to Cambridge about 1530. In 1542–3 he writes from the University:

Aristotle and Plato are now read by the boys in the original language, but that has been done among us at St. John's for the last five years. Sophocles and Euripides are now more familiar to us than Plautus was when you were here. Herodotus, Thucydides, and Xenophon are more read now than Livy was then. They talk now as much of Demosthenes as they did of Cicero at that time. There are more copies of Isocrates to be met with now than there were of Terence then. Yet we do not treat the Latin writers with contempt, but we cherish the best of them who flourished in the golden age of their literature.

It was Cheke who gave the first impulse towards bringing about this state of things; he twice read through Homer, Sophocles, Euripides, and Herodotus at a public lecture, and that too without taking any fee. He meant to do the same for all the Greek poets, historians, orators, and philosophers, if ill luck had not stood in the way of such a great advancement of learning. For when Cheke wished to enlarge his course of usefulness in the cause of learning by bringing back the true and ancient pronunciation of Greek, lo, the right reverend the bishop of Winchester, yielding to the requests of certain envious men, issued a decree to forbid the use of this new mode, and thus not only stopped the new pronunciation in spite of the remonstrances of almost all the university, but almost wholly extinguished all the zeal for learning which had been kindled up among us.[1]

Ascham tells us that at his first coming to Cambridge it was the custom to read the precepts of Aristotle without illustrating them from other authors, but that Cheke, Thomas Smith, Walter Haddon, John Watson, and others, had reformed the bad practice. For example:

When Mr. Watson in St. John's College at Cambridge wrote his excellent tragedy of *Absalon*, Mr. Cheke, he, and I, for that part of true imitation, had many pleasant talks together in comparing the precepts of Aristotle and Horace *de Arte Poetica* with the examples of Euripides, Sophocles, and Seneca. Few men in

[1] Ascham, *Works*, ed. by Giles, London, 1864–5, I. xxxvii.

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writing of tragedies in our days have shot at this mark. Some in England, more in France, Germany, and Italy, also have written tragedies in our time, of the which not one, I am sure, is able to abide the true touch of Aristotle's precepts and Euripides' examples, save only two that ever I saw, Mr. Watson's *Absalon* and Georgius Buchananus' *Jepthe*.[1]

Watson's *Absalon* is lost, and Buchanan's *Jepthah* hardly bears out Ascham's statement, at least for the precepts of Aristotle; the examples of Euripides and Seneca are clearly present. Nor does Buchanan afford definite evidence that he has studied the *Poetics*.[2] Sir John Cheke, however, is a more substantial witness. The famous controversy between Cheke and Stephen Gardiner, Bishop of Winchester, over the new pronunciation of Greek at Cambridge took place during the summer of 1542.[3] In one of his letters to Gardiner, Cheke definitely refers to the remarks on the length of *o* and *ω* in Aristotle's chapters on diction in the *Poetics*.[4] As far as I can discover, there is no reference to the *Poetics* in Gardiner, or in Thomas Smith, who allied himself with Cheke in the battle. In fact, but for Ascham's account of the Aristotelian conversations at St. John's, we might reasonably doubt Cheke's knowledge of the *Poetics*; perhaps he picked up this reference in the work of some Continental grammarian. There are similar references in Theodore Beza,[5] Adolphus Mekerchus[6] (a contemporary scholar in Holland), in Stephanus,[7] and numerous allusions in Peter Ramus.[8] All these scholars, however, wrote

[1] Ascham, *Schoolmaster*, in *Works* 3.240–1; also in Gregory Smith, *Elizabethan Critical Essays* 1.23–4. Cf. Francis Meres, *Palladis Tamia* (1598), in Gregory Smith 2.322.

[2] Of the men Ascham mentions, only Cheke and Walter Haddon show any acquaintance with Aristotelian theory. Haddon says that Ascham had introduced him to the *Rhetoric*. See his letter to Johann Sturm (December 6, 1566) in *Lucubrationes passim Collectae et Editae*, London, 1567, pp. 347–8.

[3] See Herrick, *Sir John Cheke and Aristotle's Poetics*, in *The Classical Weekly* 18 (1925). 134–5.

[4] Cheke, *De Pronuntiatione Graecae*, Basel, 1555, p. 122; also in Syvert Havercamp, *Sylloge Scriptorum*, Leyden, 1736–40, 2.286. Cf. *Poetics* 21.1458ª 10–15.

[5] See Havercamp 1.333; cf. 1.306.

[6] *Ibid.* 1.110.

[7] *Ibid.* 1.459; cf. 1.391.

[8] See Ramus, *Scholae in Liberales Artes*, Basel, 1578, Book 2 of the *Scholarum Grammaticarum Libri* XX.

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later than Cheke, and Mekerchus avowedly follows the Englishman. Cheke might have found the reference in Aldus Manutius, who is supposed to have discussed the pronunciation of Greek vowels in a lost work called *Fragmenta*.[1] In view of Ascham's testimony and of other evidence that scholars, both on the Continent and in England, were deeply interested in Greek literature, we are fairly safe in saying that the *Poetics* was known at Cambridge by 1542, if not before.

Cheke's reference to Aristotle's brief remarks on diction, with no mention of the more important principles of poetic composition, is natural enough. English scholars in the early part of the sixteenth century were still in a preliminary stage of the revival of Greek; they had to learn to read the language before they could venture upon criticism. The friendly debates over dramatic style that Ascham recalls at Cambridge must have owed somewhat more to the familiar *Ars Poetica* of Horace than to the 'precepts of Aristotle.' The modern assimilation of the *Poetics* has been a long process.

Very likely both Cheke and Ascham were indebted to their German friend, Johann Sturm, for an interest in Aristotle's critical treatises. Ascham openly acknowledges his debt in the Preface to the *Schoolmaster*:

> Yet, nevertheless, I myself spending gladly that little that I got at home by good Sir John Cheke, and that that I borrowed abroad of my friend Sturmius, beside somewhat that was left me in reversion by my old masters Plato, Aristotle, and Cicero, I have at last patched it up as I could, and as you see.[2]

[1] See Bywater, *Erasmian Pronunciation of Greek and its Precursors*, Oxford, 1908. It is perhaps worth noting that both Gardiner and Smith refer to Aristotle's remarks on diction in *De Interpretatione* (Havercamp 2.323, 483–4), just as Boethius, and after him Roger Bacon, did. The linguistic remarks in Plato's *Cratylus* and Aristotle's *De Interpretatione* and *Poetics* have often been associated. Perhaps Richard Mulcaster has the collocation in mind when he says that it is not necessary to prove his statements on the properties of words by Plato's *Cratylus* or Aristotle. (See his *Elementarie*, London, 1582, p. 168). It is impossible to determine who is mainly responsible for this association.

[2] Ascham, *Works* 3.84.

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From Sturm also—and possibly from Cheke—Ascham took his view of dramatic imitation: 'The whole doctrine of comedies and tragedies is a perfect *imitation*, or fair lively painted picture of the life of every degree of man.'[1] Here Ascham follows Horace and Plato rather than Aristotle, for he adds: 'Of this *imitation* writeth Plato at large in 3 *de Rep.*, but it doth not much belong at this time to our purpose.'[2] Though a glimpse of the Aristotelian concept of imitation was here given to English readers, Ascham's real notion was rather that of copying or emulation. The same notion was characteristic of Sturm, who, while he referred to the *Poetics*, even mentioning the six Aristotelian parts of an imitative work,[3] clearly regarded imitation as emulation.[4]

The same influence appeared about this time in another English work, *A Rich Storehouse or Treasurie for Nobilitye and Gentlemen* (1570), translated from Sturm's *Nobilitas Literata* by one 'T. B. Gent.'[5] There is in the book frequent mention of Plato and Aristotle, and of imitation (μίμησις); but here again is meant emulation, a copying of the patterns of the ancients.

As to dates of publication, the *Schoolmaster* was not published until 1570, two years after the author's death, while Cheke's letters were published fifteen years before Ascham's book. In 1554, an exile on his way to Italy, Cheke stopped for a time at Basel. There he lent the seven letters of the linguistic dispute to Caelius Secundus Curio, a scholar who took it upon himself to publish them at Basel, and did so in the following year, 1555. Therefore, until further evidence is brought forward, we shall have to say that 1555 marks the first reference to Aristotle's *Poetics* by an Englishman after the dubious allusion of Roger Bacon in the thirteenth century. Ascham still holds the honor of making the first reference in English to the *Poetics*.

[1] Ascham, *Works* 3.213; in Gregory Smith 1.7.
[2] *Ibid.*
[3] See *Commentarii in Artem Poeticam Horatii Confecti ex Scholis Jo. Sturmii*, Strasburg, 1576.
[4] See *Ioannis Sturmii de Imitatione Oratoria Libri Tres*, Strasburg, 1574.
[5] 'T. B. Gent,' the author of the *Rich Storehouse*, is identified in the *Dictionary of National Biography* as Thomas Blundeville (*fl.* 1561).

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Not long after Cheke and Ascham the allusions became more numerous, though the foreign scholars residing in England still furnished most of them. Thus Martin Bucer, the German Reformer who taught for a time at Cambridge, quoted Aristotle's περιπέτειαι (reversals of fortune or of intent) in *De Honestis Ludis*,[1] a part of his *De Regno Christi* which he presented in manuscript to Edward VI as a New-Year's gift in 1551; the work was not published until 1557, when it appeared at Basel. In 1576 Robert Peterson translated Giovanni della Casa's *Galateo*, which contains an intelligent expression of the Aristotelian tragic *catharsis:*

> Men have many times more need to weep than to laugh. And for that cause, he said, these doleful tales which we call tragedies were devised at first, that when they were played in the theatres (as at that time they were wont) they might draw forth tears out of their eyes that had need to spend them. And so they were by their weeping healed of their infirmity.[2]

The quotation is of particular interest since it furnishes one of the earliest anticipations of the 'modern pathological theory' of the *catharsis*,[3] and apparently is the first allusion to it in England.

There is a passage in the *Mirror for Magistrates* (1578), that treasure-house of tragedies, which may owe something to Aristotle:

> 'Surely,' said one of the company, 'this lady hath done much to move the hearers to pity her, and hath very well knit up her tragedy according to the beginning, but I marvel much where she learned all this poetry touched in her tale, for in her days learning was not common, but a rare thing, namely in women.' 'Yes,' quod Master Ferrers, 'that might she very well learn of the Duke her husband, who was a prince so excellently learned, as the like of his degree was nowhere to be found; and not only so, but was also a patron to poets and orators, much like as Maecenas was in the time of Augustus Caesar. This Duke was founder of the Divinity-School in Oxford, whereas he caused Aristotle's works to be translated out of Greek into Latin.'[4]

1557 ?

[1] See Bucer, *Scripta Anglicana*, Basel, 1577, p. 144.
[2] Peterson, *Galateo*, ed. by H. J. Reid, 1892, p. 31.
[3] See Bywater, *Milton and the Aristotelian Definition of Tragedy*, in *Journal of Philology* 27 (1901).274.
[4] *Mirror for Magistrates*, ed. by Joseph Haslewood, London, 1815, 2.126.

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There is no reason to suppose that the Duke and Duchess of Gloucester knew any thing about the *Poetics*, but perhaps the poet Ferrers did.

All three of the foregoing references—if the last be a real reference—bear upon plot, according to Aristotle the most important element in poetic composition. By the middle of the sixteenth century the Italian critics were laboring with classical structure, but the scanty allusions to Greek poetical theory in England were hardly more than echoes from the Continent. We do not expect, after all, to find many doctrines of Aristotle in the writings of romantic Tudor poets and playwrights; the schoolmasters were the men most seriously concerned with the New Learning.

We have seen that the masters of St. John's College applied the critical precepts of Horace and Aristotle to the ancient dramas and to contemporary imitations; but, though such practice was common enough on the Continent, it was rare in England. The deciphering of the classical texts was a slow process. As we saw in the case of Sir John Cheke, most of the English scholars had to begin with the study of grammar. Poetics in sixteenth-century England, both for the classical and the native English literature, was an evolution from the technicalities of pronunciation and grammar to versification, to figures of speech (long popular in rhetoric), and only gradually to literary criticism comparable to that contained in Aristotle's treatise. Sir John Cheke was the pioneer, and Roger Ascham his worthy successor. But with Ascham's death in 1568 many of the Cambridge traditions died. It seems that the work was not more than well-begun when the younger followers lost interest in it.

Gabriel Harvey, who went up to Cambridge some time before 1565, wrote to his friend Edmund Spenser in 1580, complaining of the growing neglect of the classics. 'Aristotle,' he says, 'is much named, but little read.'[1] Harvey himself was no Cheke, although, according to his own account, he became renowned

[1] Harvey, *Works*, ed. by Grosart, 1884, 1.69.

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beyond all precedent as a Lecturer on rhetoric.[1] In the lectures we find him using the conventional authorities of the Renaissance, Cicero and Quintilian,[2] without definite reference either to the *Rhetoric* or the *Poetics*. He knew something about Aristotle's theory, but apparently was content to take Peter Ramus' word that all of it was too impractical, too philosophical, for modern use. Like Ramus, Harvey was mainly interested in style and delivery, and his supreme authority was Cicero. 'I produce my folly to make you wiser. I worshiped M. T. as the God of Latinity, and would rather have been a Ciceronian than a saint.'[3]

In poetical matters Harvey was mainly concerned with style and versification. There is sound sense in his letters to Spenser on English verse, but no definite sign of Aristotle. His neglect of the *Poetics* is strange when we consider his delight in displaying erudition. All his writings, both English and Latin, swarm with classical allusions and quotations in which Aristotle often appears—though never the *Poetics*. We should expect Harvey to know something about the treatise, however, since he aimed to know everything. In his *Marginalia* he does specifically mention the *Poetics*, when, in going over George Gascoigne's *Certayne Notes of Instruction concerning the Making of Verse or Ryme in English* (1575), he makes the following comment:

> His aptest partition had been into precepts of Invention, Elocution, and the several rules of both, to be sorted and marshaled in their proper places. He doth prettily well, but might easily have done much better, both in the one and in the other, especially by the direction of Horace's and Aristotle's *Ars Poetica*.[4]

If he knew the *Poetics*, why did he not himself make more use of it?

[1] *Ibid.* 1. xiii.

[2] See Harvey's *Rhetor*, London, 1577, and his *Ciceronianus*, London, 1577.

[3] Harvey, *Works* 1. xvii (quoted by Morley). Cf. the *Ciceronianus*, pp. 18–19, 28. Cicero was worshiped by nearly all the English men of letters in Harvey's day. Walter Haddon (*Poemata*, London, 1567, p. 67) writes:

In Marcum Tullium Ciceronem

O Deus, o splendens Romanae gloria gentis,
Virtutis specimen, vitae praeceptor honestae.
O Cicero doctos inter doctissimus omnes,
Cur tua, temporibus nostris, non iuncta fuerunt?

[4] Harvey, *Marginalia*, ed. by G. C. Moore Smith, Stratford, 1913, p. 168.

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Harvey would have us believe, then, that Gascoigne, also a Cambridge man, neglected Aristotle, and doubtless Harvey was right. Although Gascoigne was a staunch advocate of his native English language and versification, and although modern scholars have shown that he was not so well-versed in classical literature as was once supposed—his Euripidean *Jocasta* owes nothing to Euripides, but is based on an Italian version—he could not escape the growing influence of classical criticism and practice. For example, he believed in *decorum*, and did not approve of mingling serious and comic matter in the same poem.[1] Gascoigne's friend, George Whetstone, was even more insistent upon *decorum*, objecting to the English playwrights' disregard of the Unity of Time, and their indiscreet mingling of clowns and kings in the same play.[2] Thus we see classical criticism, or an Italian version of it, penetrating the writings of men chiefly interested in their own native literature.

So far we have been mainly concerned with Cambridge, where the study of the *Poetics* doubtless began, but we may be sure that all this while Oxford, the stronghold of the 'Old Aristotle,' was not idle. It was at Oxford, let us recall, that Vives lectured. The chief interest in the critical treatises of Aristotle, however, seems to have turned to the *Rhetoric* rather than the *Poetics*, for Oxford was still more devoted to logic than to poetry.

Before 1552,[3] we find John Jewel, the Bishop, a most distinguished scholar in his day, referring to Aristotle's work on rhetoric,[4] in no very complimentary terms, to be sure, but showing that he knew something about it. John Reynolds (1549–1607), another man of prodigious learning and strict morality, lectured on the three books of the *Rhetoric*.[5] One may still examine his copy of the work (Morel's edition, Paris, 1562) in the Bodleian Library. The book is interleaved with the most

[1] See Gascoigne, in Gregory Smith 1.48.
[2] See Whetstone, Dedication of *Promos and Cassandra*, in Gregory Smith 1.59.
[3] See Thomas Fowler, *History of Corpus Christi College*, Oxford, 1893, p. 95.
[4] See Jewel, *Works*, Cambridge, 1850, 4.1286.
[5] See Anthony à Wood, *Athenae Oxonienses*, (2nd ed.), London, 1721, 1.339.

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copious notes, liberally sprinkled with references to Cicero and Quintilian, all written in a beautifully clear hand. As yet we have no evidence that any Oxonian labored over the *Poetics* as carefully as did Reynolds over the *Rhetoric*. Apart from a vague allusion in a Latin address (*Oratio in Laudem Poeticae*) we have no reason to suppose that even the great Reynolds studied the *Poetics*.[1] Probably the Christian piety which did not permit him to condone such immoral productions as 'stage-playes,'[2] would not have permitted him to condone Aristotle's emphasis upon the drama.

Thomas Lodge (1558–1625), also an Oxford man, was well-acquainted with many of Aristotle's writings, the logical works, the *Ethics* and the *Politics*, and many of the books on natural science. His *Defence of Poetry* (1579) is far removed from Aristotle, yet he has picked up at least one familiar doctrine: 'But (of truth) I must confess with Aristotle that men are greatly delighted with imitation.'[3] When he adds, however, that 'it were good to bring those things on stage that were altogether tending to virtue,' we see that, as usual, the Horatian influence is much the more important.

The fiery Giordano Bruno, coming to Oxford in 1583, startled orthodox scholars by attacking the sacred Aristotle. His battle was waged in the main against the 'scientific' writings, but even the *Poetics* did not escape him. In the *Eroici Furori*, printed at London in 1585, and dedicated to Sir Philip Sidney, Bruno delivers one of the first unfavorable comments on the 'rules of Aristotle':

> Cicada. To whom, then, are the rules of Aristotle useful?
> Tansillo. To him, who unlike Homer, Hesiod, Orpheus, and others, could not sing without the rules of Aristotle, and who, having no Muse of his own, would coquette with that of Homer.[4]

The passage shows the influence of those Renaissance commenta-

[1] See Reynolds, *Orationes Duodecim*, London, 1619, p. 248.
[2] See Reynolds, *The Overthrow of Stage-Playes*, 1599.
[3] Lodge, in Gregory Smith 1.83.
[4] Bruno, *Heroic Enthusiasts*, trans. by L. Williams, London, 1887, 1.39; cf. 1.37–8.

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tors on the *Poetics* who were the real formulators of the 'rules.' It also leads us to infer that the 'rules' were firmly enough established in England for Bruno to think it worth while to attack them.

Sir Philip Sidney, as an Oxford man, had consequently read some of Aristotle at an early age. In 1574 he wrote to his tutor, Hubert Languet, of his desire to master Greek so that he might read Aristotle in the original; the current translations struck him as inadequate.[1] At the time, he particularly wished to read the *Politics*, though in a subsequent letter he speaks of the *Ethics* as the 'beginning and foundation of all his [Aristotle's] work.'[2] In another letter he definitely referred to the *Rhetoric*.[3]

In addition to his first-hand acquaintance with Aristotle, Sidney, in his foreign travels, evidently had seen the commentaries, on the *Poetics*, of the leading Italian critics, Scaliger, Minturno, and probably Castelvetro. Therefore his *Defence of Poesie*, or *An Apologie for Poetrie*, probably written before 1583, but not published until 1595, became a typical Renaissance blend of Aristotle and Horace, with a good measure of Plato thrown in. The aim of poetry, to Sidney, was didactic; the ideal poet was more of a popular philosopher than an artist. His conception of poetic criticism, however, was the most marked advance towards the classical, and towards Aristotle, that any Englishman had yet made. Sidney was fairly well acquainted with Greek literature—with Homer, Sophocles, Euripides, Plato, and Xenophon, among others; and, with the aid of the Italians, he managed to grasp the outstanding features of Aristotle's theory of poetry. Horace was conjoined, of course.

In the *Defence of Poesie*, after the customary Renaissance eulogy of poets and their creations, Sidney offers the notion that poetry is an idealization of Nature; like all other art, it is an imitation:

[1] See Sidney, *Works*, ed. by Albert Feuillerat, Cambridge, 1922–3, 3.84.
[2] *Ibid.* 3.124.
[3] *Ibid.* 1.118. John Hoskins, in his *Figures of Rhetoric*, says that Sidney translated the two first books of Aristotle's *Rhetoric*. See *The Life of Sir Philip Sidney*, by Malcolm William Wallace, Cambridge, 1915, p. 327.

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Poesy, therefore, is an art of imitation, for so Aristotle termeth it in the word *Mimesis*, that is to say, a representing, counterfeiting, or figuring forth: to speak metaphorically, a speaking picture, with this end, to teach and delight.[1]

Here we have a good Horatian view of the early passages in the *Poetics*. We may be sure, however, that Sidney has Aristotle chiefly in mind when he speaks of poetical imitation as having the 'most conveniency to nature of all other; insomuch that, as Aristotle saith, those things which in themselves are horrible, as cruel battles, unnatural monsters, are made in poetical imitation delightful.'[2]

In discussing poetry and history, Sidney goes even beyond Aristotle,[3] making out poetry to be superior not only to history but to philosophy as well:

Truly, Aristotle himself, in his discourse of Poesy, plainly determineth this question, saying that Poetry is *Philosophoteron* and *Spoudaioteron*, that is to say, it is more philosophical and more studiously serious than History. His reason is because Poesy dealeth with *Katholou*, that is to say, with the universal consideration; and the History with *Kathekaston*, the particular, 'Now,' saith he, 'the universal weighs what is fit to be said or done, either in likelihood or necessity (which the Poesy considereth in his imposed names), and the particular only marketh whether Alcibiades did, or suffered, this or that.' Thus far Aristotle; which reason of his (as all his) is most full of reason.[4]

The best, the 'right,' poets, 'to imitate, borrow nothing of what is, hath been, or shall be; but range, only reined with learned discretion, into the divine consideration of what may be and should be.'[5]

[1] Sidney, *Works* 3.9; Gregory Smith 1.158.
[2] Sidney, *Works* 3.20; Gregory Smith 1.173. Cf. *Poetics* 1448 b 8–12.
[3] See Spingarn, *Literary Criticism in the Renaissance*, p. 273.
The notion that poetry is superior to philosophy was common in England after Sidney's day. In 1674 we find Thomas Rymer, for example, attributing to Aristotle the statement that 'Tragedy more conduces to the instruction of mankind than even Philosophy itself.' See Spingarn, *Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century* 2.164.
[4] Sidney, *Works* 3.16; Gregory Smith 1.167. Cf. *Poetics* 1451 a 36–8, 1451 b 1–11.
[5] Sidney, *Works* 3.10; Gregory Smith 1.159.

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Sidney's brief remarks on the drama are of peculiar interest to the student of Aristotle, for the *Defence of Poesie* marked the beginning of dramatic criticism in England. This beginning was essentially Aristotelian, and we shall find that for many years dramatic criticism continued to be so.

With the aid of the Italian commentators, Sidney managed to grasp many of the leading doctrines of the *Poetics*; but he could not fully comprehend the most fundamental principle, namely, that every good poem must form an organic whole. The common Renaissance interpretation of poetic unity was mechanical, not artistic in the true Greek sense; it seldom went much beyond the *decorum* that forbade indiscriminate mingling of clowns and kings and violations of the 'Unities' of Time and Place. As a result, Sidney had no definite idea of the most important classical unity, Unity of Action. In the *Defence of Poesie*, he condemns his native English drama as crude and ill-formed. The only English play, he says, that observes the rules either of 'honest civility' or 'skilful poetry' is *Gorboduc* (the first notable neo-classical tragedy in English), and even it is not without serious flaws:

> Notwithstanding as it is full of stately speeches and well-sounding phrases, climbing to the height of Seneca his style, and as full of notable morality, which it doth most delightfully teach, and so obtain the very end of poesy; yet in truth it is very defectious in the circumstances, which grieves me, because it might not remain as an exact model of all tragedies. For it is faulty both in place and time, the two necessary companions of all corporeal actions. For where the stage should always represent but one place, and the uttermost time presupposed in it should be, both by Aristotle's precept and common reason, but one day; there is both many days and places inartificially imagined.[1]

Sidney does not favor the native variety of comedy that 'naughty playmakers and stage-keepers have justly made odious':

> Only thus much now is to be said, that the comedy is an imitation of the common errors of our life, which he representeth

[1] Sidney, *Works* 3.38; Gregory Smith 1.196–7.

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in the most ridiculous and scornful sort that may be; so as it is impossible that any beholder can be content to be such a one.[1]

The writers of comedy must beware of striving only to arouse laughter, for the 'great fault even in that point of laughter, and forbidden plainly by Aristotle, is that they stir laughter in sinful things, which are rather execrable than ridiculous, or in miserable, which are rather to be pitied than scorned.'[2] Comedy, even at its best, as in the plays of Plautus and Terence, though a worthy creation, is inferior to nobler tragedy:

So that the right use of comedy will, I think, by nobody be blamed, and much less of the high and excellent tragedy, that openeth the greatest wounds, and showeth forth ulcers that are covered with tissue; that maketh kings fear to be tyrants, and tyrants manifest their tyrannical humors; that with stirring the effects of admiration and commiseration teacheth the uncertainty of this world, and upon how weak foundations gilden roofs are builded. . . . But how much it can move, Plutarch yieldeth a notable testimony of the abominable tyrant Alexander Pheraeus, from whose eyes a tragedy, well made and represented, drew forth abundance of tears, who without all pity had murdered infinite numbers, and some of his own blood; so as he that was not ashamed to make matters for tragedies, yet could not resist the sweet violence of a tragedy.[3]

The influence, direct or indirect, of Aristotle is obvious; here Sidney has some notion of a tragic *catharsis*, the moving of pity and fear, the tears that are brought forth by the 'sweet violence of a tragedy.' Sidney's interpretation, however, is not so much 'pathological' as moral: the proper effect of a tragedy is purification of the spectator's emotions. In his conception of tragedy, a noteworthy element that does not go back to Aristotle, though it soon was to be associated with Aristotelian doctrine, is the idea of 'admiration' as one of the emotions properly aroused. The Italian Minturno added 'admiration' to the 'teaching and

[1] Sidney, *Works* 3.23; Gregory Smith 1.176–7.
[2] Sidney, *Works* 3.41; Gregory Smith 1.200. Cf. *Poetics* 1449 a 32–7.
[3] Sidney, *Works* 3.23–4; Gregory Smith 1.177–8.

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delight' of poetry,[1] and Sidney also has some such notion; but apparently he took 'well-raised admiration' to be a tragic emotion as well: 'The tragedies of Buchanan do justly bring forth a divine admiration.'[2] Sidney almost anticipated the seventeenth century when 'admiration' was raised to the level of Aristotle's 'pity' and 'fear.'

On the relative merits of tragedy and the epic poem, Sidney follows the Italians, and falls into the conventional Renaissance encomium of heroic poetry:

> But if anything be already said in the defense of sweet poetry, all concurreth to the maintaining the heroical, which is not only a kind, but the best and most accomplished kind, of poetry; for as the image of each action stirreth and instructeth the mind, so the lofty image of such worthies most inflameth the mind with desire to be worthy, and informs with counsel how to be worthy.[3]

Thus the *Defence of Poesie* stands out as an epitome of literary criticism in the Renaissance,[4] and the beginning in England of that Aristotelian criticism which, with varying fortunes, has persisted to the present day. The schoolmasters of early Tudor times established the study of classical literature; Sidney and his followers established a classical criticism.

In the philosophical conception of poetic art no other Elizabethan critic can compare with Sidney. The others are still worrying over rhetorical figures of speech, and quarreling about rhyme and versification; or else they are content to repeat what Sidney has already said. The problems of rhyme and versification are highly important features in the history of native English

[1] See Minturno, *De Poeta*, Venice, 1559, p. 106: 'Illud autem ne te praetereat uelim, sic poetis esse dicendum, ut siue doceant, siue oblectent, siue moueant, haec singula statim admiratio legentis, audientisue consequatur.' Also p. 180: 'Uerum enim eiusmodi hoc rerum genus esse plane intelliget, qui huius poetae munus esse animaduertet, in admirationem adducere auditorem. Admiranda uero esse, quae uel afferunt miserationem, uel terrorem incutiunt.'

Cf. Scaliger, *Poetices* 3.96.

[2] Sidney, *Works* 3.41; Gregory Smith 1.201.

[3] Sidney, *Works* 3.25; Gregory Smith 1.179.

[4] See Spingarn, *Literary Criticism in the Renaissance*, p. 268.

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criticism, and the efforts of Gascoigne, Spenser, and Harvey materially aid the development of English poetry; but as far as Aristotelian theory goes the *Defence of Poesie* stands almost alone. When Sidney says, 'Aristotle writes the Art of Poesy,'[1] one hesitates to doubt his first-hand knowledge of the treatise. With the other Elizabethan apologists and defenders of poetry, however, the evidence usually points to second-hand information, or worse.

William Webbe's *Discourse of English Poetrie* (1586) abounds in Horatian maxims and Renaissance conventions, and there are a few dubious allusions to the *Poetics*. The vague remark that Aristotle reports no important poets in Greece before Homer has some foundation in chapter 4 of the *Poetics*.[2] Likewise, Webbe's statement that, according to Aristotle, good versification came in with Homer, may be traced to chapter 24 of the *Poetics*.[3] Nor can we unhesitatingly dismiss Webbe's comparison of Homer and Empedocles: 'Aristotle sayth of Empedocles that in his judgment he was only a natural philosopher, no poet at all, nor that he was like unto Homer in any thing but his metre or number of feet, that is, that he wrote in verse.'[4] Webbe's phrasing is clumsy, but the quotation is undeniably close to a passage in the *Poetics*. If Webbe were not a consistently unoriginal person, one might be tempted to give him the benefit of the doubt and credit him with first-hand knowledge. In any case, however,

[1] Sidney, *Works* 3.35; Gregory Smith 1.192.

[2] See Webbe, in Gregory Smith 1.235.

[3] *Ibid.* 1.248.

Aristotle's remarks on early poetic composition were fairly well known to English critics in Elizabethan times. Samuel Daniel, in his *Defence of Rhyme* (1603?), speaks of Aristotle's theory that poetic composition arises naturally and spontaneously; see Daniel, in Gregory Smith 2.360. John Florio's translation of Montaigne in 1603 contains a passage that is usually referred to chapter 24 of the *Poetics*: 'His words [Homer's] (according to Aristotle) are the only words that have motion and action; they are the only substantial words.' See *Essays*, Book 2, ch. 36. It is much more likely that Montaigne has in mind the *Rhetoric* 1411 ^{b} 32.

[4] Webbe, in Gregory Smith 1.236.

Cf. *Poetics* 1447 ^{b} 17–20 (Bywater's translation): 'Homer and Empedocles, however, have really nothing in common apart from their metre; so that, if the one is to be called a poet, the other should be termed a physicist rather than a poet.'

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a reading of the *Discourse of English Poetrie* readily shows that the author failed to grasp a single one of the important principles in Aristotle's treatise.

The *Arte of English Poesie* (1589), by Puttenham, is a significant book in early English criticism, but not a guide-book for the student of Aristotle. Puttenham's theories of poetic imitation are entirely conventional, and more mediæval than classical. He, too, was primarily concerned with the rhetorical elements in poetry, and, with external form and versification. Perhaps it is worth noting, however, that Puttenham traced the popular *decorum* of the Latin writers to the Greek τὸ πρέπον, the phrase in the *Poetics*.[1]

Sir John Harington was closer to the Italian critics, and consequently to Aristotle. In the *Briefe Apologie of Poetrie* prefixed to his translation (1591) of the *Orlando Furioso*, Harington argues for the 'rules' of poetic composition. He undertakes to justify Ariosto's art by Aristotle's precepts:

> Briefly, Aristotle and the best censurers of poesy would have the Epopeia, that is the heroical poem, should ground on some history, and take some short time in the same to beautify with his poetry. So doth mine author take the story of K. Charles the Great, and doth not exceed a year or thereabout in his whole work. Secondly, they hold that nothing should be feigned utterly incredible. And sure Ariosto neither in his enchantments exceedeth credit (for who knows how strong the illusions of the devil are?), neither in the miracles that Atolfo by the power of St. John is feigned to do, since the Church holdeth that prophets both alive and dead have done mighty great miracles. Thirdly, they would have an heroical poem (as well as a tragedy) to be full of Peripetia, which I interpret an agnition of some unlooked-for fortune either good or bad, and a sudden change thereof. Of this what store there be the reader shall quickly find.[2]

To his own satisfaction, at least, Harington succeeds in proving that the *Orlando Furioso* conforms to the classical laws of epic

[1] See Puttenham, in Gregory Smith 2.174. Cf. *Poetics* 1455ª25. Puttenham may have taken the phrase from Cicero's *Orator* (ch. 21): 'The Greeks call this πρέπον, we call it *decorum*.'

[2] Harington, in Gregory Smith 2.216.

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poetry: 'As for Aristotle's rules, I take it he [Ariosto] hath followed them very strictly.'[1]

Harington's understanding of 'Aristotle's rules' is fairly typical of the Elizabethan critic; he seldom tries to discriminate between Horace and Aristotle, and usually trusts to the Italian critics for his knowledge of the latter. Poetic art, says Harington, is 'but an imitation (as Aristotle calleth it), and therefore [the poets] are allowed to feign what they list . . .—may lie, if they list, *cum privelegio*.'[2] Tragedy is free from the taint of scurrility and lewdness, since it represents 'only the cruel and lawless proceedings of princes, moving nothing but pity or detestation.'[3] Always didactic, Harington consistently prefers the Virgilian epic poem to tragedy.

At the close of the sixteenth century Aristotle was in the air. Many of the commentators were as absurd as Harington, but the literary men were growing familiar with the neo-classical theories that passed as Aristotelian. The puzzle of the tragic *catharsis*, and the problem of the dramatic unities on the modern stage, doubtless furnished rich material for the evening debates in London taverns, and occasionally a reflected light from Aristotle appeared in the plays and other poems of the time.

Spenser, educated at Cambridge, and familiar with the *Politics* and *Ethics*,[4] apparently accepted from some source Aristotle's notion of 'pity and fear.' In the *Ruines of Time* we read:

> Much was I troubled in my heavie spright,
> At sight of these sad spectacles forepast,
> That all my senses were bereaved quight,
> And I in minde remained sore agast,
> Distraught twixt feare and pitie.[5]

[1] Harington, in Gregory Smith 2.216.

[2] *Ibid.* 2.200–1.

[3] *Ibid.* 2.209.

[4] See W. F. De Moss, *The Influence of Aristotle's Politics and Ethics on Spenser*, Chicago, 1918.

[5] Spenser, *Ruines of Time* 575–9.

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Robert Yarington, an obscure Elizabethan playwright, probably had a similar notion. In his *Two Lamentable Tragedies* (1601), he writes:

> I see your sorrows flow up to the brim,
> And overflow your cheeks with brinish tears,
> But though this sight bring surfeit to the eye,
> Delight your ears with pleasing harmony,
> That ears may countercheck your eyes, and say,
> 'Why shed your tears, this deed is but a play.'[1]

According to Charles Lamb, the 'whole theory of the reason of our delight in tragic representations, which has cost so many elaborate chapters of criticism, is condensed in these four last lines—Aristotle quintessentialized.'[2] Possibly so. But we must confess that the rest of the tragedy scarcely conforms to Aristotle's precepts.

The great playwright of the sixteenth century is perhaps more renowned for breaking than for following any alien rules of the drama. Yet Shakespeare would have been the last man to rebel against established traditions, if the traditions were useful. The Elizabethan debt to classical Roman drama, to Seneca, Plautus, and Terence, appears in Shakespeare as well as in less-inspired contemporaries. Shakespeare also knew the 'rules.' He was well-acquainted with the formal distinctions that orthodox criticism made between tragedy, comedy, history, and pastoral. He knew that the critics preferred the play with 'scene undividable' (thus preserving the precious 'Unity of Time') to the 'poem unlimited,'[3] and although he had little use for such barren formalities, he occasionally apologized for his violation of the established 'rules.'

Thus the Chorus in *Henry V* (Act 2) refers to the neglect of 'Unity of Place':

> Linger your patience on; and well digest
> The abuse of distance while we force a play.

[1] See *Two Lamentable Tragedies*, in Tudor Facsimile Texts, 1913.
[2] Lamb, *Works*, ed. by MacDonald, London, 1903, 9.100, note.
[3] See *Hamlet* 2.2.401–7.

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In the *Winter's Tale* (Act 4) the Chorus speaks of violating the 'Unity of Time':

> Impute it not a crime
> To me or my swift passage, that I slide
> O'er sixteen years, and leave the growth untried
> Of that wide gap; since it is in my power
> To o'erthrow laws, and in one self-born hour
> To plant and o'erwhelm custom.

And finally, the Chorus in *Henry V* (Act 5) asks allowance for the general disregard of all the Unities:

> I humbly pray them to admit the excuse
> Of time, of numbers, and due course of things,
> Which cannot, in their huge and proper life
> Be here presented.

As an instance of more constructive dramatic criticism one could cite the well-known speech of Hamlet to the players. If we take Hamlet's theories as serious expressions of the author, we see that Shakespeare thought of the drama as a representative imitation of nature: the purpose of playing 'was and is, to hold, as 't were, the mirror up to nature.'[1] There may be a trace of Aristotelian theory in King Richard's lament (*Richard II* 5.1. 44–8):

> Tell thou the lamentable tale of me,
> And send the hearers weeping to their beds;
> For why, the senseless brands will sympathize
> The heavy accent of thy moving tongue,
> And in compassion weep the fire out.

But we must not here attempt to deduce Shakespeare's principles of dramatic composition. That he was alive to current dramatic theories, however, particularly after the year 1598, when he became acquainted with Ben Jonson, is evident. Further, he was perfectly able, and, upon at least one occasion, willing, to construct a play that conformed to the all-important 'Unities' —witness the *Tempest*. On the other hand, who can say that even the *Tempest* is Shakespeare's concession to the 'rules'? Ben

[1] See *Hamlet* 3.2.20–4. Hamlet's advice on acting, and his insistence on restraint, offer a striking parallel to Aristotle's criticism of excessive gesture (*Poetics* 1461 ^{b}29–35, 1462 ^{a}1–4).

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Jonson, from whom Shakespeare may well have learned of the 'rules,' would probably have said that any regularity in Shakespeare's plays was pure accident.

> I tell him he needs Greek;
> I'll talk of rules and Aristotle with him,
> And if his tongue's at home he'll say to that:
> 'I have your word that Aristotle knows,
> And you mine that I don't know Aristotle.'
> He's all at odds with all the unities,
> And what's yet worse, it does n't seem to matter;
> He treads along through Time's old wilderness
> As if the tramp of all the centuries
> Had left no roads—and there are none for him;
> He doesn't see them, even with those eyes—
> And that's a pity, or I say it is.[1]

At the close of the century the 'rules' of Aristotle, as formulated by the Italians, arrived in England to take almost undisputed possession of the critical field, and to make serious inroads upon creative literature. Even in liberty-loving England, Aristotle the critic was destined to become almost as formidable an authority for the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as 'the Philosopher' was for the Middle Ages. The great romantic literature of the Elizabethans was just forming when Sir Philip Sidney laid the foundations of English literary criticism with essentially classical and Aristotelian materials. For nearly two centuries English criticism was to remain classical and Aristotelian. We must bear in mind, however, that from the first these English interpretations of Aristotle's theories were hopelessly adulterated with Horatian maxims and Continental scholarship, first with Italian, then with Dutch, and finally, and most influental of all, with French. We may agree with Robinson's Ben Jonson, and regard it as unfortunate that Shakespeare, for one, could not have studied the *Poetics* at first hand, without the accretions and inflammations from men of less insight than either Aristotle or Shakespeare.

[1] Edwin Arlington Robinson, *Ben Jonson entertains a Man from Stratford.*

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CHAPTER II

THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

English scholars and critics of the sixteenth century went to the Continent for their knowledge of Aristotle's poetic doctrines, and for the most part to the various Italian commentaries on the *Poetics*. A few Englishmen, among them Sir John Cheke and Sir Philip Sidney, probably examined the actual text of the treatise. It was not until 1623 that a translation of the *Poetics* appeared from an English press. Theodore Goulston, a physician and a competent classical scholar, who had brought out a Latin version of the *Rhetoric* in 1619, four years later published his *Aristotelis de Poetica Liber, Latine Conversus, et Analytico Modo Illustratus*. This pioneer translation was a creditable performance that succeeding editors have almost invariably found useful. Goulston made the *Poetics* readily accessible to his countrymen; after 1623, there was no reason why an Englishman, if he cared to become acquainted with Aristotle's critical theories, could not have done so.

Before examining the men of the century who were primarily concerned with literature and literary criticism, we should give some notice to Francis Bacon, statesman, orator, philosopher, scholar, and critic. Notwithstanding his known antagonism to the Aristotle of the Schoolmen, Bacon clearly reveals in his writings that he was profoundly influenced by Aristotle.[1] He shows a thorough knowledge of the *Rhetoric*,[2] and the chances are he had read the *Poetics* as well. His discussion of poetry in the *Advancement of Learning* (1605) is Aristotelian in spirit.[3] He

[1] See Emil Wolff, *Francis Bacon und seine Quellen*, Berlin, 1910.

[2] See Herrick, *The Early History of Aristotle's Rhetoric in England*, in *Philological Quarterly* 5 (1926) .253–4.

[3] See Bacon, *Works*, ed. by Spedding, Ellis, and Heath, New York, 1864, 6.202–3. Cf. *De Augmentis Scientiarum*, in *Works* 2.220 ff. Passages from the *Advancement of Learning* are included in Spingarn's *Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century* 1.1–9.

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regards poetry not as a mere imitation of Nature, since it is not tied to the laws of matter (being free to sever what Nature has joined, and join what Nature has severed), but as an idealization of actual events—'feigned history,' as he calls it. He has a decided moral emphasis foreign to the *Poetics*, but by this time we are accustomed to the notion that 'Poesie serveth and conferreth to Magnanimity, Morality, and to delectation.'

There is little more. We can only regret that Bacon was not duly interested in poetical theory: 'But it is not good to stay too long in the Theatre; let us now pass on to the judicial place or palace of the mind, which we are to approach and view with more reverence and attention.' We, however, must disregard Bacon's advice, and linger.

The most important critic in the early part of the century was Ben Jonson, best-known for his plays and masques, and for various lyrical poems, but teeming with information on structure and style. With unbounded energy and aggressive perseverance he tried to set up in England literary standards of play-making that would compare with the classical 'rules' of the Continent. And in no small measure he succeeded, for his practice and theory, though often discredited in his own day, deeply impressed at least three succeeding generations of playwrights and critics. Jonson was the man who laid down the laws of the English stage.[1] Aristotle and Horace were for him the authorities upon whose doctrine these laws were based.

Jonson's critical theories are most clearly defined in the dedications and prologues of his plays, in his English version of Horace's *Ars Poetica*, and in his commonplace-book, the *Discoveries*. Much of his criticism evidently has been lost. He told Drummond that he had written a 'discourse of poesy both against Campion and Daniel.'[2] His critical notes on the *Ars Poetica* doubtless perished in the fire that destroyed his library in 1623.

[1] See John Oldham's *Ode upon the Works of Ben Johnson* (1678).

[2] *Notes of Conversations with Ben Jonson made by William Drummond of Hawthornden* (1619), ed. by G. B. Harrison, London, 1923, p. 3.

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If we correctly interpret Jonson's own words in his *Execration upon Vulcan*, these notes on Horace were illustrated from Aristotle:

> All the old Venusine, in poetry,
> And lighted by the Stagirite, could spy,
> Was there made English; with a grammar too,
> To teach some that their nurses could not do.[1]

The translation of the *Ars Poetica* survived with the *English Grammar*,[2] and possibly we have Jonson's critical notes, or some part of them, in the *Discoveries*.

Timber, or *Discoveries*, was first published in the Second Folio edition (1640–1) of Jonson's works, but the author probably recorded these 'Observations' between 1620 and 1635. Most of the material was copied from classical writers or their modern commentaries; Castelain, Spingarn, and Schelling in our own day, have taken pains to identify the sources. Wholesale translation or paraphrase was Jonson's method, in his critical works, as it was even in his poems and plays. But we must not say that the ideas he took from Cicero, Quintilian, Seneca, or some Renaissance commentator, were not his own; Jonson's virtue as a critic was his discrimination. When he wished to examine Aristotle's *Poetics*, he selected the Latin translation and criticism of the ablest scholar in the early seventeenth century, Daniel Heinsius.

At the beginning of the century the learned men of the Netherlands took over the reins of criticism from the Italians, and Heinsius and Vossius became the great names in European scholarship. Heinsius fell heir to the position of Joseph Scaliger. His excellent little treatise *De Tragoediae Constitutione*, first published at Leyden in 1611, was hailed by the critics as the 'quintessence of Aristotle's *Poetics*.'[3] Heinsius appended to this treatise the Greek text of the *Poetics*, side by side with his own Latin trans-

[1] Cf. *Conversations*, pp. 5, 17–18; Preface to *Sejanus*.

[2] In the *Grammar* Jonson refers to Aristotle's remarks on the natural composition of verse—ἐκ τῶν αὐτοσχεδιασμάτων. See *Works*, ed. by Gifford-Cunningham, London, 1875, 9.264. Cf. *Poetics* 4.1448 b 23–4.

[3] See Spingarn, *Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century* 1.xvii.

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lation. William Drummond owned a copy of *De Tragoediae Constitutione*, which he may have lent to his friend Jonson.[1] At any rate, Jonson secured a copy; his conception of Aristotle's theory is in essence that of Heinsius. His interpretations still bear the stamp of Horace, yet on Aristotle Heinsius was a safer guide than the Italian scholars; and Jonson, besides fortifying the doctrines established by Sidney, clarified and corrected some of them. He thus brought classical criticism in England another step closer to the true Aristotle.

Jonson accepts the common Renaissance definition of the poet as *maker*, and of poetry as *imitation*:

> A poet is that which by the Greeks is called κατ' ἐξοχήν, ὁ ποιητής, a maker, or a feigner; his art an art of imitation, or feigning, expressing the life of man in fit measure, numbers, and harmony; according to Aristotle, from the word ποιεῖν, which signifies to make or feign. Hence he is called a poet, not he which writeth in measure only, but that feigneth and formeth a fable, and writes things like the truth. For the Fable and Fiction is (as it were) the form and soul of any poetical work.[2]

Jonson's notion of poetic imitation, however, is not altogether that found in the *Poetics*, for he thinks imitation not so much an idealized representation of Nature, but rather as the ability to 'convert the substance or riches of another poet to his own use'[3]—not servile imitation, to be sure, but emulation in the sense in which Virgil imitated Homer.

Jonson evidently believed, with Aristotle, that plot is the form and soul of poetry, for he surely observed the principle in practice. His best plays are marvels of careful, often complicated, construction; and though we may not agree with the critic[4] who placed the *Alchemist* and *Oedipus Rex* with *Tom Jones* as the finest plots in all literature, we must recognize Jonson as one of the masters in dramatic structure, and should bear in mind that

[1] See Saintbury, *History of Criticism* 2.356, note.
[2] Jonson, *Discoveries*, ed. by Maurice Castelain, Paris, pp. 119–20; Spingarn 1.50. Cf. Spingarn 1.29.
[3] Jonson, *Discoveries*, p. 125; Spingarn 1.53.
[4] See Coleridge, *Table Talk* (July 5, 1834), in *Complete Works*, ed. by Shedd, 6.521.

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emphasis on plot was a fixed Jonsonian canon. Jonson was always conscious of his own craftsmanship in the drama; and while his concern for structure may have led to stilted artificiality in some of his work, it gave his theories a solid basis, and, as for classical criticism in England, it marked the most striking advance yet made upon Sidney's *Defence of Poesie*. Sidney had no clear conception of classical unity. But Jonson had. His discussion of unity of action in the *Discoveries*[1] is a masterly digest of Aristotle's remarks; and although he took his matter from Heinsius, he made it his own, and a significant part of English criticism.

Both the epic poem and the drama, says Jonson, should each form a perfect whole, 'which hath a beginning, a midst, and an end.'[2] Jonson, thanks to Heinsius, clearly understands that poetic unity is not a mechanical thing; nor, as Aristotle carefully points out, is unity of action gained by having one man for hero.[3] Jonson sees that the ideal unity is organic:

> The Fable is called the Imitation of one entire and perfect Action, whose parts are so joined and knit together as nothing in the structure can be changed or taken away without impairing or troubling the whole, of which there is a proportionable magnitude in the members.[4]

Although Jonson contributed a sound interpretation of the Unity of Action, placing the main emphasis where, according to Aristotle, it belongs (upon the plot), he by no means rejected the 'unities' of Time and Place, favorites with most Renaissance critics and poets as they strove to reproduce classical forms. In the Prologue to *Every Man in his Humour* (Folio, 1616), the author is the champion of the 'rules,' who, disdaining the loose structure and unnatural tricks of the popular play, offers 'one such to-day as other plays should be.' There will be no child in swaddling clothes shooting up 'past threescore years'; no Chorus will 'waft

[1] See Jonson, *Discoveries*, pp. 136–42; Spingarn 1.60–64.
[2] Jonson, *Discoveries*, p. 137; Spingarn 1.60.
[3] Jonson, *Discoveries*, pp. 140–1; Spingarn 1.62. Cf. *Poetics* 1451 a 16–35.
[4] Jonson, *Discoveries*, p. 136; Spingarn 1.60.

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you o'er the seas.' In the *Discoveries* Jonson states that the action in both tragedy and comedy should not exceed the 'compass of one day.'[1] In the Preface to *Sejanus* (1605) he acknowledges that his play is 'no true poem in the strict laws of time'; but protests that it is impossible, and indeed unnecessary, to observe the practice of the ancients before a modern audience. Like many another English playwright who followed him, Jonson could not always make his practice fit his theory. He gives the impression that he yields to popular taste against his will, and that he would be happier if allowed to follow the traditional rules of the drama.

In his own practice, therefore, Jonson allowed himself some latitude with the minor 'unities' of Time and Place. The scene should not shift by extraordinary leaps; the playwright should avoid sea-voyages—but is not forced to use the same setting for all acts. Jonson's plainest, and perhaps sincerest, expression of his theory is in the introductory scene of *Every Man out of his Humour* (1600):

If those laws you speak of had been delivered us *ab initio*, and in their present virtue and perfection, there had been some reason of obeying their powers; but 't is extant that that which we call *Commoedia* was at first nothing but a simple and continued song, sung by one only person, till Susario invented a second; after him Epicharmus a third; Phormus and Chionides devised to have four actors, with a prologue and chorus; to which Cratinus long after added a fifth and sixth: Eupolis, more; Aristophanes, more than they; every man in the dignity of his spirit and judgment supplied something. And, though that in him this kind of poem appeared absolute and fully perfected, yet how is the face of it changed since in Menander, Philemon, Cecilius, Plautus, and the rest! who have utterly excluded the Chorus, altered the property of the persons, their names and natures, and augmented it with all liberty, according to the elegancy and disposition of those times wherein they wrote. I see not, then, but we should enjoy the same license, or free power to illustrate and heighten our in-

[1] Jonson, *Discoveries*, p. 139; Spingarn 1.61–2.
Compare the Prologue to *Volpone* (1607):

> The laws of time, place, persons he observeth,
> From no needful rule he swerveth.

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vention, as they did; and not be tied to those strict and regular forms which the niceness of a few, who are nothing but form, would thrust upon us.

The strictest advocates of classical drama, taking for law Aristotle's advice, that the Chorus be treated as one of the actors, insisted upon a Chorus for all tragedies. Jonson admits that his *Sejanus* is wanting in a 'proper Chorus,' but does not regard the Chorus as an absolute necessity on the modern stage. In his next tragedy, *Catiline* (1611), however, he introduces a Chorus, though it scarcely fits the Aristotelian counsel; it merely appears at the end of every Act, except the last, to offer moral reflections upon the progress of the action.

Jonson's interest in tragedy was dampened by the public reception of *Sejanus* and *Catiline*, which, to be sure, are in spirit Roman rather than Greek; but it is strange, especially when we consider his intimate knowledge of Heinsius' *De Tragoediae Constitutione*,[1] that none of his extant criticisms deals with the function of tragedy, the tragic *catharsis*. Perhaps he treated the subject in one of the works destroyed by the fire.

There is in him no lack of theoretical discussion of comedy. Jonson took his efforts to reform English comedy most seriously, for in his eyes comedy fulfils as serious a function as tragedy:

> The parts of a comedy are the same with a tragedy, and the end is partly the same; for they both delight and teach: the comics are called διδάσκαλοι, of the Greeks, no less than the tragics.[2]

He even goes so far as to imply that the comic poet is superior to the tragic in moving the thoughts and feelings of his audience.[3]

Jonson's view of the proper effect of comedy goes back through Heinsius to the *Poetics*, but has suffered from a curious misinterpretation:

[1] Heinsius translates κάθαρσις as '*expiatio*,' but seems to have some notion of the modern, medical or 'pathological,' interpretation of the function of tragedy. See *Tragoediae Constitutione*, pp. 10, 18, 247.

[2] Jonson, *Discoveries*, p. 133; Spingarn 1.58.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 128; Spingarn 1.55.

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Nor is the moving of laughter always the end of comedy; that is rather a fowling for the people's delight, or their fooling. For, as Aristotle says rightly, the moving of laughter is a fault in comedy, a kind of turpitude that depraves some part of a man's nature without a disease; as a wry face without pain moves laughter, or a deformed vizard, or a rude clown drest in a lady's habit and using her actions. We dislike and scorn such representations, which made the ancient Philosophers ever think laughter unfitting in a wise man.[1]

We wonder a little how the author of such a statement reconciled his theory with his practice in plays like the *Alchemist* and *Bartholomew Fair*.

Jonson evidently thought of comedy as having its own *catharsis* —the 'physic of the mind,' as he calls it in the famous introductory scene of *Every Man out of his Humour*. In the same scene Asper declares:

> I would give them pills to purge,
> And make them fit for fair societies.
> We hope to make the circles of your eyes
> Flow with distilled laughter: if we fail,
> We must impute it to this only chance,
> Art hath an enemy call'd ignorance.

In the Prologue to *Volpone* there is another decided suggestion of a comic *catharsis*:

> All gall and copperas from his ink he draineth,
> Only a little salt remaineth,
> Wherewith he'll rub your cheeks, till red with laughter,
> They shall look fresh a week after.

Finally, the best example of all comes from one of his inferior plays, from the interlude between Acts 1 and 2 of the *Magnetic Lady, or Humours Reconciled*:

Give our springs leave to open a little by degrees; a source of ridiculous matter may break forth anon that shall steep their temples, and bathe their brains in laughter, to the fomenting of stupidity itself and the awaking any velvet lethargy in the house.

[1] Jonson, *Discoveries*, pp. 133–4; Spingarn 1.58.
Sidney, in his *Defence of Poesie*, fell into the same error; see his *Works* 3.41, in Gregory Smith 1.99–200. Cf. note in Spingarn 1.231–2.

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Jonson could hardly have known the *Tractatus Coislinianus*, but it surely looks as though he were applying Aristotelian doctrines to his Comedy of Humors. The judging of comedy by the principles of Greek tragedy and epic found in the *Poetics* was not uncommon among Renaissance critics, and Jonson probably took his cue from the Italian scholars—he could have taken it from Trissino.[1]

If Jonson was not quite the scholar he is sometimes considered, yet he was a learned man who had a lasting effect on English literature and criticism. With his Comedy of Humors he gave England a definite type of intellectual drama; with his theories, fragmentary and contradictory as they often are, he did more to establish classical, Aristotelian, standards of criticism than any other man between Sidney and Dryden. His influence was not for blind adherence to the strict followers of Aristotle: 'Nothing is more ridiculous than to make an author a Dictator, as the Schools have done Aristotle.'[2] He would not have all of the poet's liberty bound down by the 'rules':

> I am not of that opinion to conclude a poet's liberty within the narrow limits of laws which either the grammarians or philosophers prescribe. For before they found out those laws there were many excellent poets that fulfilled them; amongst whom none more perfect than Sophocles, who lived a little before Aristotle.[3]

He was eminently successful with his doctrines; in the eyes of succeeding critics up to the close of the century, Jonson ranked as the best playwright and the best critic of his generation, the only competent English critic of the early seventeenth century.[4]

Beyond the fact that he owned a copy of Heinsius' *De Tragoediae Constitutione*, William Drummond offers little to show that he studied the *Poetics*. His friend, Sir William Alexander, Earl of Stirling, who wrote tragedies, and occasionally dabbled in literary criticism, offers scarcely more. His tragedies are Senecan,

[1] See Trissino, *Opere*, Verona, 1729, 2.120, 126–7.
[2] Jonson utters this Baconian statement in the *Discoveries*, p. 107; Spingarn 1.43.
[3] Jonson, *Discoveries*, pp. 129-30; Spingarn 1.56.
[4] See Thomas Rymer, Preface to Rapin, in Spingarn 2.164.

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and his criticism no closer to the *Poetics* than to Scaliger. There are a few remarks in his *Anacrisis, or a Censure of Some Poets Ancient and Modern* (1634?), that bear the stamp of Aristotle—tragedy for example, should be grounded upon true history, 'where the greatness of a known person, urging regard, doth work the more powerfully upon the affections.'[1] As to these tragic affections he seems to consider the moving of *pity* the chief delight.[2]

In 1650 Sir William Davenant, often called the father of Restoration drama, addressed the Preface to his heroic *Gondibert* to an honored friend, Thomas Hobbes. There is a good deal of conventional literary criticism in the Preface; but in spite of his interest in the drama and theatre, and in spite of his professed allegiance to Aristotle, 'who like an absolute monarch over arts hath almost silenced his master [Plato] throughout the schools of Europe, [and] labors to make Poesy universally current by giving laws to the science,'[3] Davenant has grasped only one fundamental doctrine of the *Poetics*, the now familiar idea that poetry is more universal than history:

> Wise poets think it more worthy to seek out truth in the passions than to record the truth of actions and practice, to describe mankind just as we are persuaded or guided by instinct, not particular persons as they are lifted or leveled by the force of Fate, it being nobler to contemplate the general History of Nature than a selected diary of Fortune.[4]

In the same year, 1650, Hobbes answered Davenant in an epistle that does little credit to his own critical ability. If we may believe the gossip Aubrey, Hobbes paid no great respect to Aristotle's writings, or certainly not to all of them: 'I have heard him [Hobbes] say that Aristotle was the worst teacher that ever

[1] Alexander, in Spingarn 1.186. Cf. *Poetics* 1451[b] 15 ff.; Scaliger, *Poetices* 3.96.

[2] See Alexander's dedicatory sonnet to Drummond's *Teares, on the Death of Moeliades*, in *Poetical Works of William Drummond*, ed. by Kastner, Manchester, 1913, 1.74:

> For never plaints did greater pity move,
> The best applause that can such notes approve.

[3] Davenant, Preface to *Gondibert*, in *Works*, London, 1673, p. 20; in Spingarn 2.52. Cf. Scaliger, *Poetices* 7(2).1.

[4] Davenant, in Spingarn 2.3.

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was, the worst politician and ethic—a country fellow that could live in the world [would be] as good; but his *Rhetoric* and *Discourse of Animals* was rare.'[1] Hobbes admired the *Rhetoric*; in fact, he admired it so much that during the years he acted as tutor to the young Earl of Devonshire, 1631–37, he prepared an English version of the book for his pupil. From the careful notice he takes of the references from the *Rhetoric* to the *Poetics*,[2] it seems but reasonable to assume that Hobbes had examined this companion-treatise, though it evidently was not one of the works he cared for. His own critical observations are remote from Aristotle. He thinks that the aim of poetry, for example, is 'by imitating human life in delightful and measured lines, to avert men from vice and incline them to virtuous and honorable actions.'[3] Hobbes' chief literary interest lay in the epic, or heroic, poem, the function of which is to 'raise admiration,' and, of course, to teach and delight.

None of the critics we have examined since Jonson, with the possible exception of Hobbes, gives evidence of a first-hand knowledge of the *Poetics*. For what little Aristotelian criticism each picked up, they were all content to follow Scaliger. Ben Jonson apparently was the only English critic, in the first half of the century, to give serious attention to the important contributions from the Netherlands. As far as theories of poetry go, the Italian authorities were still supreme. Abraham Cowley, for example, displays great erudition in his essays and in the annotations to his poems, offering numerous references to Aristotle's philosophical and scientific writings, to the *Politics* and the *Rhetoric*; but for literary criticism he, too, relied upon Scaliger. Cowley's practice is typical of the popular literary men before 1660.

Occasionally a more serious scholar arose, who, while he was acquainted with practically all the Italian and Dutch commen-

[1] Aubrey, *Brief Lives*, ed. by Clark, Oxford, 1898, 1.357.
[2] See *The Whole Art of Rhetoric*, in *English Works of Thomas Hobbes*, ed. by Molesworth, London, 1840, 6.487, 488, 497, 510.
[3] Hobbes, *Answer to Davenant*, in Spingarn 2.54–5.

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tators, was not content to stop at either; he went straight to the Greek text of the *Poetics*. Thomas Stanley (1625–1678) was such a man. Stanley in the main owes his reputation to his studies in Greek literature. From 1655 to 1662 he brought out his *History of Philosophy*, wherein he took notice, without comment, of the *Poetick*[1] as one of Aristotle's extant writings. In 1663–4 he produced his monumental edition of Aeschylus, a remarkable performance that long was the standard. In the elaborate commentary we find ample evidence of his thorough acquaintance with the *Poetics*.[2]

Stanley was a great scholar, and an accomplished man of letters; his chief interest in the classical drama was that of interpreter rather than critic. He must have exerted a strong classical influence upon the few friends who shared his quiet, retired life. One of these friends, Sir Edward Sherburne (1618–1702), himself something of a poet and critic, offers as a token of esteem the following verses, *To Mr. Stanley, on his Unimitable Poems*:

> The Stagirite, who poesy defines
> An imitation, had he read thy lines,
> And thy rich fancy known, he would have then
> Recalled the learned errour of his pen,
> And have confest, in his convicted state,
> Nought those could equal, this would imitate.[3]

Edward Phillips dedicated his *Theatrum Poetarum* (1675) to Stanley and Sherburne, and it is possible that he learned something about Aristotelian criticism from Stanley, though more likely that he first heard of the *Poetics* from his uncle, and teacher, John Milton. At any rate, in his Preface Phillips is a cautious champion of the classical laws of poetry. His chief concern is with *decorum*; he does not think well of mixing comedy with tragedy, and apparently favors modern subjection to the 'rules,' at least those on the Chorus and the Unity of Time:

[1] See Stanley, *History of Philosophy* (Sixth Part), London, 1656, p. 34.
[2] See Stanley, *Aeschyli Tragoediae*, ed. by J. C. De Pauw, The Hague, 1745, pp. 705, 706, 707, 713, 718.
[3] Sherburne, in Chalmers' *English Poets* 6.630.

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I shall only leave it to consideration whether the use of the Chorus and the observation of the ancient Law of Tragedy, particularly as to limitation of time, would not rather, by reviving the pristine glory of the Tragical, advance than diminish the present, adding, moreover, this caution, that the same *indecorums* are to be avoided in Tragedy as have already been intimated in Heroic Poem.[1]

Phillips' conception of the distinction between tragedy and comedy is not strictly that of Aristotle, but it is possible he had the *Poetics* in mind:

Next to the Heroic Poem (if not, as some think, equal) is Tragedy, in conduct very different, in heighth of argument alike, as treating only of the actions and concernments of the most illustrious persons, whereas Comedy sets before us the humors, converse, and designs of the more ordinary sort of people: the chief parts thereof are the ἦθος and πάθος, by which latter is meant that moving and pathetical manner of expression, which in some respect is to exceed the highest that can be delivered in Heroic Poesie.[2]

The Preface to the *Theatrum Poetarum* is so superior to the other literary efforts of Phillips that critics have suspected the assistance of his uncle, John Milton.[3] We shall find that Milton's own critical opinions are in accord with those we have noted in Phillips.

As early as 1642, in his *Reason of Church-Government urged against Prelaty*,[4] Milton considers whether or not the epic poet should follow the rules of Aristotle or the laws of nature. Two years later, 1644, in his *Tractate of Education*, he recommends the study of 'those organic arts which enable men to discourse and write perspicuously, elegantly, and according to the fitted style of lofty, mean, or lowly.' For poetry he would have the student turn to 'that sublime art which in Aristotle's *Poetics*, in Horace, and the Italian commentaries of Castelvetro, Tasso, Mazzoni,

[1] Phillips, in Spingarn 2.270.
[2] *Ibid.* 2.269–70.
[3] See Spingarn 2.350.
[4] See Milton, *Prose Works*, ed. by J. A. St. John, London, 1867, 2.478.

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and others, teaches what the laws are of a true epic poem, what of a dramatic, what of a lyric, what *decorum* is, which is the grand masterpiece to observe.'[1]

Miss Ida Langdon[2] has published a thorough study of Milton's theory of poetry, in which she takes account of the Italian influence on it. She endeavors to show Milton's adjustment to a middle ground between Platonic and Aristotelian theories, a position entirely in keeping with Italian criticism in the Renaissance. To precisely what extent he was indebted to the Italian critics for his knowledge of Aristotle it is difficult to say—save that the debt was large. Yet one thing is clear. Milton arrived at the best interpretation of the doctrines of the *Poetics* that any Englishman had yet attained.

Ben Jonson, when he followed Heinsius, displayed a good understanding of the basic concept in Aristotle's criticism, the concept of organic unity; but more often, in both theory and practice, he betrayed either a serious misunderstanding of the *Poetics*, or a neglect of it that was contradictory to his professed classical standards. Milton, however, in his criticism and in his poetry, furnished as good expositions and patterns of the classical Unity of Action as one would expect or desire from a modern writer. In the *Second Defence of the People of England* (1654) he writes:

> As the epic poet who adheres at all to the rules of that species of composition does not profess to describe the whole life of the hero whom he celebrates, but only some particular action of his life, as the resentment of Achilles at Troy, the return of Ulysses, or the coming of Aeneas into Italy, so it would be sufficient, either for my justification or apology, that I have heroically celebrated at least one exploit of my countrymen.[3]

The Unity of Action in his later development of the epic poem—that is, in *Paradise Lost*—was not solely the result of natural genius. The author found much help in the 'sublime art' of Aristotle's *Poetics*.

[1] Milton, *Prose Works* 3.473–4; in Oliver M. Ainsworth, *Milton on Education*, Cornell Studies in English 12, New Haven, 1928, pp. 59-60.

[2] *Milton's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art*, Cornell Studies in English 8, New Haven, 1924.

[3] Milton, *Prose Works* 1.299.

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The best place, however, in which to study Milton's use of Aristotelian principles is *Samson Agonistes* (1671), a conscious attempt at classical drama, and therefore one that should bear the test of classical criticism, that is, the test from Aristotle.

Opinion on Milton's tragedy among the great critics has been divided: Samuel Johnson[1] belittled *Samson Agonistes*, but Goethe told Eckermann[2] that no modern poet had ever written so truly in the spirit of the ancients, and De Quincey remarked that 'probably the best exemplification of a Grecian tragedy that ever will be given to a modern reader is found in the *Samson Agonistes* of Milton.'[3] Let us turn to the play itself.

On the title page, as a motto, we find:

Arist.Poet.Cap.6. τραγωδία μίμησις πράξεως σπουδαίας, etc. *Tragoedia est imitatio actionis seriae, etc. Per misericordiam et metum perficiens talium affectuum lustrationem.*

The translation of κάθαρσις by 'lustratio' indicates that Milton fell in with the prevailing concept of moral *purification*, though the definition of tragedy in the Preface shows that he also had some notion of the 'pathological' theory:

Tragedy, as it was anciently composed, hath been ever held the gravest, moralest, and most profitable of all other poems; therefore said by Aristotle to be of power by raising pity and fear, or terror, to purge the mind of those and such like passions, that is, to temper and reduce them to just measure with a kind of delight, stirred up by reading or seeing those passions well imitated. Nor is Nature wanting in her own effects to make good his assertion; for so, in physic, things of melancholic hue and quality are used against melancholy, sour against sour, salt to remove salt humors.

Bywater[4] has produced numerous extracts from commentaries of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries to prove beyond

[1] See Johnson, *Rambler*, No. 139.

[2] Eckermann, *Gespräche mit Goethe*, Leipzig, 1885, 2.122: 'Ich habe vor nicht langer Zeit seinen *Simson* gelesen,' sagte Goethe, 'der so im Sinne der Alten ist wie kein anderes Stück irgend eines neueren Dichters.'

[3] De Quincey, *Collected Writings*, ed. by Masson, Edinburgh, 1889–90, 10.372.

[4] Bywater, *Milton and the Aristotelian Definition of Tragedy*, in *Journal of Philology* 27 (1901). 267–75.

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doubt that the pathological, the 'modern,' interpretation of *catharsis* was known in Italy before Milton's day. We have already quoted from the Elizabethan translation of *Galateo*[1] an illustrative passage that Bywater also records. Through Italian influence or otherwise, the pathological theory is definitely present in Milton's writings. It again appears in the closing lines of *Samson Agonistes*:

> His servants he, with new acquist
> Of true experience from this great event,
> With peace and consolation hath dismist,
> And calm of mind, all passion spent.

'Calm of mind, all passion spent' is true to Aristotle and his view of the end of tragedy.[2]

Milton aimed to construct his play in the ancient manner:

> Of the style and uniformity, and that commonly called the Plot, whether intricate or explicit, which is nothing indeed but such economy, or disposition of the fable as may stand best with verisimilitude and decorum, they only will best judge who are not unacquainted with Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, the three tragic poets unequaled yet by any, and the best rule to all who endeavor to write tragedy.

The plot of *Samson Agonistes* is of the uninvolved, or, as Milton calls it, 'explicit' type, since there is no real Discovery nor real Peripety. Samson meets no great change of fortune, though he suffers a final Catastrophe. (Catastrophe, however, is a feature of the tragic poem less emphasized by Aristotle than by modern students of Aristotle, for example, by Minturno and Scaliger.) Dr. Johnson thinks that nothing occurs between the beginning and end to hasten or delay Samson's death, and that the entrances of Dalila and the giant Harapha of Gath are more or less episodic. 'The whole drama,' says Johnson, 'if its superfluities were cut off, would scarcely fill a single act; yet this is the tragedy

[1] See above, p. 19.

[2] Milton's idea of the proper function of lyrical poetry is closely allied to the lines in *Samson Agonistes*. See *Prose Works* (*Reason of Church-Government*) 2.479: 'To allay the perturbations of the mind, and set the affections in right tune.'

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which ignorance has admired, and bigotry applauded.'[1] So far Johnson. But we must remember that Aristotle recognizes a legitimate form of drama in what he calls the 'tragedy of suffering' (παθητική).[2] Therefore, while *Samson Agonistes* is not the best type of Tragedy in the Aristotelian sense (it falls far short of *Oedipus Rex* and *Iphigenia in Tauris*), it offers a worthy comparison to the *Ajax* of Sophocles or the *Prometheus Bound* of Aeschylus, and as a tragedy of suffering it is by no means unsuccessful. Samson himself gives us the secret:

> My griefs not only pain me
> As a lingering disease,
> But, finding no redress, ferment and rage,
> Nor less than wounds immedicable
> Rankle, and fester, and gangrene,
> To black mortification.
> Thoughts, my Tormentors, armed with deadly stings,
> Mangle my apprehensive, tenderest parts,
> Exasperate, exulcerate, and raise
> Dire inflammation which no cooling herb
> Or medicinal liquor can assuage,
> Nor breath of vernal air from snowy Alp.
> Sleep hath forsook and given me o'er
> To death's benumbing opium as my only cure.
> Thence faintings, swoonings of despair,
> And sense of Heaven's desertion.[3]

Milton, in characterizing his chief agent, tries to follow classical methods. More than one critic thinks that Samson's tragic flaw is garrulity, the 'shameful garrulity' which Samson himself admits once snared him.[4] Now garrulity is commonly associated with old age, and Milton's Samson, though victim of a proud despair, is still the mightiest of mortal men, and by no means a proper type of garrulous senility. Perhaps, however, we are quibbling over a needless demand. Perhaps the tragedy of suffer-

[1] Johnson, in the *Rambler*, No. 139.
[2] See *Poetics* 1455 b 34.
[3] *Samson Agonistes* 617–32.
[4] *Ibid.* 487–93.

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ing does not allow the use of a flaw so dramatic as the ignorant blindness of soul in an Oedipus or a Creon; Samson, in spite of his blindness, often sees things clearly enough.

The intellectual element in the make-up of Samson is strongly emphasized by Milton, who was, as Aristotle would have commended, a master of rhetoric. In fact, as Verity states, 'The force of his [Milton's] sentiment (διάνοια) often eclipses the beauty of its expression.'[1] One has only to compare *Samson Agonistes* with the story in *Judges* to see the remarkable change wrought by the English poet.

As to minor matters, the Chorus, as Milton points out in his Preface, is 'introduced after the Greek manner'; that is, it satisfies Aristotle's dictum that the Chorus should be treated as one of the actors. Since Milton based his poem on Italian as well as ancient models, we expect, and find, a strict observance of the 'unities' of time and place. As to Time, Milton himself says: 'The circumscription of time wherein the whole drama begins and ends is, according to ancient rule and best example, within the space of 24 hours.'

We must conclude, therefore, that although *Samson Agonistes* may not be the ideal tragedy of Aristotle, it bears comparison with various examples of Greek drama and with the Greek art of poetry. Milton succeeded in what he set out to do. The poem, though never intended for the stage, is an impressive example of a growing taste in England for classical drama. None of Milton's successors, not even Dryden, who followed the French neoclassicists rather than the ancients or even the Italians, ever reflected so accurately the spirit of ancient tragedy. The judgment of Goethe and De Quincey holds true.

Milton's tragedy represents the literary drama of the seventeenth century, and the literary drama was soon to find a place on the courtly stage of the Restoration; but during the greater part of the century the popular theatre went on its own way, the playwrights well knowing that classical imitations usually

[1] See Verity's edition of *Samson Agonistes*, Cambridge, 1912, p. xxxvii.

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offer employment for the critics rather than entertainment for the public. Ben Jonson's tragedies, by no means strictly 'regular,' were not always successful on the stage. Almost as soon as the 'rules' were introduced, the popular playwrights, particularly the writers of comedies, began scoffing at the English 'Greeks.' Richard Brome, a 'son of Ben,' offers a typical protest in the Prologue to his *Novella* (acted in 1632, printed in 1653):

> All we pretend to is but Mirth and Sense,
> And he that looks for more must e'en go seek
> Those Poet-Bounces that write English Greek.
> Our Author aims only to gain your laughter,
> Which if you won't, he'll laugh at you hereafter.

Later on, in 1673, Aphra Behn[1] was even more emphatic in her denunciation of the pedantic tyrants who, knowing little or nothing of successful methods in playwriting, made trouble for the honest entertainer. The critics who discoursed so formally about 'the rules' took plays far too seriously; for her, at least, there were no musty unities, but rather pleasure and entertainment.

Not every writer subscribed to the didactic aim in poetry and drama. Even Abraham Cowley held that delight is the main end of poesy.[2] Sir Robert Howard, much more serious than Aphra Behn, though not so successful in the theatre, was quite as emphatic in his contempt of the 'general rules laid down for plays by strict reason,' and especially of the ridiculous 'unities' of Time and Place.[3] Samuel Butler, however, furnishes the most spirited example of the reaction to neo-classical criticism and practice. His vigorous attacks on the formal criticism of his day were in many cases justified, for there must have been countless small poets palming off second-hand scraps with the bravest air of learning. Butler describes one of these pedants:

[1] See Behn, Epistle to the Reader in *The Dutch Lover* (acted in 1673).
[2] See his Preface to *Poems* (1656), in Spingarn 2.81.
[3] See Howard, Preface to *The Great Favorite* (1668), in Spingarn 2.108–9.

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If he understands Latin or Greek, he ranks himself among the learned, despises the ignorant, talks criticisms out of Scaliger, and repeats Martial's bawdy epigrams, and sets up his rest wholly upon pedantry.[1]

One of Butler's sharpest satires, *Upon Critics who judge of Modern Plays precisely by the Rules of the Antients*, is a protest against Rymer's *Tragedies of the Last Age* (1678). The following lines give a sample of Butler's grievances:

> Reduce all Tragedy by rules of art
> Back to its antique theatre, a cart,
> And make 'em henceforth keep the beaten roads
> Of reverend choruses and episodes;
> Reform and regulate a puppet-play,
> According to the true and ancient way,
> That not an actor shall presume to squeak
> Unless he have a licence for 't in Greek,
> Nor Whittington henceforward sell his cat in
> Plain vulgar English, without mewing Latin;
> No pudding shall be suffered to be witty,
> Unless it be to terrify or pity;
> Nor devil in the puppet play b' allowed
> To roar and spit fire but to fright the crowd,
> Unless some god or devil chance t' have piques
> Against an ancient family of Greeks;
> Others may have leave to tremble and take warning
> How such a fatal progeny th' are born in;
> For none but such for Tragedy are fitted,
> That have been ruined only to be pitied;
> And only those held proper to deter
> Wh' have had th' ill luck against their wills to err;
> Whence only such as are of middling sizes,
> Between morality and venial vices,
> Are qualified to be destroyed by Fate,
> For other mortals to take warning at.[2]

Evidently Butler was not ignorant of the main source of classical criticism, the *Poetics*. He was particularly affronted by Aris-

[1] Butler, *Characters and Passages from Note-Books*, ed. by A. R. Waller, Cambridge, 1908, p. 49.

[2] Butler, in Spingarn 2.278–9.

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totle's explanation of the function of that tragedy which, instead of trying to instruct the understanding (the only end to which it should be designed), merely seeks to arouse pity and terror—'foolish pity and infeasible terror.'[1] Finally: 'To humor two such childish passions only is as sottish and ridiculous. . . . These two maggots of terror and pity are very untowardly put together as the only ends of tragedy.'[2]

Another satirical poet of the day, John Oldham (1653–83), who translated the ever-popular *Ars Poetica* of Horace, was more lenient towards ancient criticism. Himself a poet of genuine worth, he at times felt ashamed of his leanings. In July, 1678, he writes to a friend, describing his vain attempts to stifle his weakness:

> Oft to divert the wild caprice I try
> If sovereign Wisdom and Philosophy,
> Rightly applied, will give a remedy:
> Straight the great Stagirite I take in hand,
> Seek Nature and myself to understand:
> Much I reflect on his vast worth and fame,
> And much my low and groveling aims condemn,
> And quarrel that my ill-packed fate should be
> This vain, this worthless, thing called Poetry:
> But when I find this unregarded toy
> Could his important thoughts and pains employ,
> By reading there I am but more undone,
> And meet that danger which I meant to shun.[3]

In spite of many sensible and spirited protests against the tyranny of formal criticism, the neo-classical 'rules' steadily gained ground in England. A good example of the moralizing interpretations of Aristotle, which for the most part were imported from France, is the *Essay upon Poetry* (1682), by John Sheffield, Earl of Mulgrave, Duke of Buckinghamshire. Mulgrave's imitation of Horace was an extremely popular, and possibly the most generally-admired, literary product of the late seventeenth

[1] Butler, *Characters and Passages from Note-Books*, p. 451.
[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 451–2.
[3] Oldham, *Works* (6th ed.), London, 1703, pp. 249–50.

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century. He believed in the 'unities,'[1] getting them from Dryden and the French, and he picked up a few Aristotelian principles, though there is no evidence that he took them directly from the *Poetics*. His emphasis on Plot is important:

> First on a plot employ thy careful thoughts,
> Turn it with time a thousand several ways,
> This oft alone has given success to plays.
> Reject that vulgar error which appears
> So fair, of making perfect characters.[2]

In 1685 Robert Wolseley, in his Preface to Rochester's *Valentinian*, deplored the scraps of Le Bossu, Rapin, Boileau, and Dryden that were gathered together in Mulgrave's *Essay upon Poetry*. Wolseley himself had the highest regard for the classics—he held, for example, that Unity of Action is a fundamental rule of the stage;[3] but he rightly objected to classical criticism in its modern, didactic dress.

The French influence, however, continued to flourish, considerably invigorated by the English translation in 1684 of the famous *Pratique du Théâtre* of François Hédelin, Abbé d'Aubignac. The fundamental precept in this most Aristotelian of Aristotelian books is d'Aubignac's advice to the young dramatic poet: 'He must begin with applying himself to the reading of Aristotle's *Poetics* and those of Horace.'[4]

The most important critics in England during the latter half of the century were John Dryden and Thomas Rymer. Dryden's *Essay of Dramatic Poesy* appeared as early as 1668, bringing with it the most typical arguments of the French critics, but establishing at the same time a definite school of English criticism that emphasized the glories of the national literature. Before examin-

[1] Mulgrave, in Spingarn 2.291. The English take the Unities from the French rather than, as did Milton, from the Italians. Dryden is largely responsible for introducing them, and there are many playwrights who follow his lead. Shadwell, in his Preface to *The Sullen Lovers* (1668) writes: 'I have in this play, as near as I could, observed the three Unities of Time, Place, and Action.' See Spingarn 2.148.

[2] Mulgrave, in Spingarn 2.292–3.

[3] See Wolseley, in Spingarn 3.2.

[4] *The Whole Art of the Stage*, London, 1684, 1.30.

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ing Dryden in detail we must try to determine the part Rymer played in introducing Aristotle to his countrymen.

Thomas Rymer (1641–1713) entered the perilous lists of criticism in 1674 with his translation of Rapin's *Reflections on Aristotle's Treatise of Poesie*. A champion of formal criticism from the first, he persevered to the end as the doughtiest of all English Aristotelians. He deplored the unhappy state of English poetry which arose from the poets' ignorance or neglect of the 'fundamental Rules and Laws of Aristotle.'[1] National pride, therefore, prompted him to undertake the task of establishing classical standards of literature among his countrymen, who had been without the services of a real critic since the death of Ben Jonson. In each of Rymer's three critical writings, in the translation of Rapin (1674), in the *Tragedies of the Last Age, Considered and Examined by the Practice of the Ancients, and by the Common Sense of all Ages* (1678), and in his *Short View of Tragedy* (1693), he remembers Aristotle on almost every page. To be sure, it is rarely the Aristotle of the *Poetics*, for Rymer beheld the *Poetics* through 'French spectacles,'[2] though well-acquainted with the Italian critics and with Heinsius; but to the seventeenth century Aristotle, in whatever dress, was Aristotle, and Rymer did as much as any one to make him a familiar authority in England. To cite merely one important achievement, Rymer succeeded in establishing the Aristotelian examination of a play as a common procedure in English criticism. To Rymer, Aristotle was the supreme authority, the final judge of all matters poetic, whether ancient or modern. In the Advertisement of his translation of Rapin he declares: 'To say the truth, what is good on this subject is all taken from Aristotle, who is the only source whence good sense is to be

[1] Rymer, Preface to Rapin, in Spingarn 2.167. On page 142 of his *Tragedies of the Last Age* (1678) Rymer says: 'I have thought our poetry of the last age as rude as our architecture; one cause thereof might be that Aristotle's *Treatise of Poetry* has been so little studied amongst us; it was perhaps commented upon by all the great men in Italy before we well knew (on this side of the Alps) that there was such a book in being.'

[2] See G. B. Dutton, *The French Aristotelian Formalists and Thomas Rymer*, in *P.M.L.A.* 29 (1914). 185.

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drawn, when one goes about to write.'[1] Consequently Rymer's critical writings embody virtually all the doctrines of the *Poetics*, often illustrated by examples from modern authors, and in particular, from Shakespeare.

Rymer takes poetry in general to be an idealized imitation of Nature, more excellent, more philosophical, and therefore more universal, than history.[2] The poet should always observe the classical law of probability; he must avoid the extravagant marvels affected by many modern authors.[3] Rymer consistently opposes what later, in Dennis and Shaftesbury, for example, comes to be termed 'Gothic' and romantic. Indeed, for him, 'poetry has no life, nor can have any operation, without probability.'[4] This worship of probability (surely carried far beyond the demands of Aristotle) is the chief reason for his condemnation of Shakespeare's *Othello*: 'Nothing is more odious in Nature than an improbable lie; and certainly never was any play fraught like this of *Othello* with improbabilities.'[5]

Rymer has no such conception as Milton's of the perfect whole in poetry; he is too dependent upon the mechanical standards set in Italy and France; his notion of organic unity is still too much that of 'one illustrious and perfect action.'[6] The good writer scrupulously avoids a multiple action. Unity of Action, in fact, is closely bound up with the other unities; for Rymer, the good poet must observe all three of them.[7] The much-admired tragedies of Shakespeare and of Beaumont and Fletcher fall far short of the best, *i.e.*, classical, standards, since their actions are not single, and, further, they are full of extraneous matter such as comedy,

[1] Spingarn prints only the Preface to the edition of 1674; for the main part I have had to use the later edition of 1694.

[2] See Rymer's Preface to Rapin, in Spingarn 2.171; *Tragedies of the Last Age*, pp. 14–16; *A Short View of Tragedy*, pp. 144–5.

[3] Rymer's Preface to Rapin, in Spingarn 2.167–8.

[4] *Ibid.* 2.171.

[5] Rymer, *A Short View of Tragedy*, p. 92; Spingarn 2.223.

[6] Rymer's Preface to Rapin, in Spingarn 1.172. Cf. *Tragedies of the Last Age*, p. 106.

[7] See Rymer, *Tragedies of the Last Age*, p. 24.

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humor, farce, and the like. The tragical part of *Othello*, for example, is nothing more than a 'bloody farce, without salt or savor.'[1]

On the proper function of tragedy Rymer is more tolerant than his didactic French masters. He insists on pleasure as the chief aim of the poet, though he believes that all good poetry is bound to furnish profit as well. There is a good deal of moral discussion of the tragic *catharsis* in the translation of Rapin,[2] but Rymer's own remarks seem to indicate a better interpretation, one that at least approaches the view we call 'pathological.' Tragedy deals with the emotions of pity and fear. The tragic poet aims to purge the passions of his audience; this purgation is the 'physic of the mind that he makes palatable.'[3] Again, he berates *Othello* for its failure to fulfil the proper principles of good tragedy:

> What can remain with the audience to carry home with them from this sort of poetry, for their use and edification? How can it work, unless (instead of settling the mind, and purging our passions) to delude our senses, disorder our thoughts, addle our brain, pervert our affections, hair our imaginations, corrupt our appetite, and fill our head with vanity, confusion, *tintamarre*, and jingle-jangle?[4]

Rymer, in contrast with most of the later critics in the seventeenth century, is more interested in tragedy than in the epic poem, though he clearly has a profound admiration for Homer and Virgil. He says, indeed, that the 'epic poem is that which is the greatest and most noble in poesy; it is the greatest work that human wit is capable of';[5] but here he merely translates Rapin, who, with Le Bossu, extolled the epic poem above all other

[1] Rymer, *A Short View of Tragedy*, p. 146; Spingarn 2.255.

[2] Rymer, *Monsieur Rapin's Reflections*, p. 109: 'He [Aristotle] alleges that tragedy is a public lecture, without comparison more instructive than philosophy; because it teaches the mind by the sense, and rectifies the passions by the passions themselves, in calming by their emotion the troubles they excited in the heart.'

[3] Rymer, *Tragedies of the Last Age*, p. 140; Spingarn 2.206.

[4] Rymer, *A Short View of Tragedy*, p. 146; Spingarn 2.254–5.

[5] Rymer, *Monsieur Rapin's Reflections*, p. 77.

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forms of literature. Rymer, in fact, seems to be one of the few Englishmen of his day who resisted the spell of heroic poetry. Was it because he was so ardent a votary of Aristotle?

Rymer's most influential gift to English criticism is his use of the examination suggested by Aristotle in the *Poetics*; that is, he analyzes (actually, tears to pieces) several tragedies of Shakespeare and of Beaumont and Fletcher according to the Aristotelian formula of Plot, Character, Thought, and Expression—a method by no means novel in the world of criticism, but revolutionary enough in England to provoke the indignation of contemporary men of letters, notably Samuel Butler.[1] Even Dryden, with strong classical leanings of his own, believes that Rymer goes too far:

'Tis not enough that Aristotle has said so; for Aristotle drew his models of tragedy from Sophocles and Euripides; and, if he had seen ours, might have changed his mind.[2]

Dryden grants that the Greek dramatists created closer-knit plots (since their plots are shorter); but otherwise the English are superior:

To conclude, therefore: if the plays of the ancients are more correctly plotted, ours are more beautifully written. And if we can raise passions as high on worse foundations, it shows our genius in tragedy is greater; for in all other parts of it the English have manifestly excelled them.[3]

Rymer is throughout consistent; he never stoops from his Aristotelian pedestal, let his patriotic enemies rail as they will. Plot to Rymer, as to Aristotle, is the 'Soul of Tragedy.'[4] The plot, or fable, is the chief test of the poet:

It is the Fable which is properly the poet's part; because the other three parts of Tragedy, to wit the Characters are taken

[1] See above, p. 54.

[2] Dryden, in Johnson's *Lives of the English Poets*, ed. by Hill, 1.474.

[3] Dryden, *ibid.* 1.479.

[4] Rymer, *Tragedies of the Last Age*, p. 4; Spingarn 2.183. Cf. *A Short View of Tragedy*, p. 86; Spingarn 2.219.

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from the moral philosopher; the Thoughts, or sense, from them that teach rhetoric; and the last part, which is the Expression, we learn from the grammarians.[1]

Accordingly, in his examination of the English tragedies Rymer devotes most of his space and condemnation to the structure of the plots.

As to the character of the hero in tragedy, Rymer again is scrupulously Aristotelian. The ideal tragic hero must be a good man, and a man of good sense, not a madman or a villain, not an Amintor, Othello, Iago, Roderigo, or Cassio, not a character who is all flaws. The ancients did not make such mistakes, for they understood that the characters in tragedy must be idealized:

They said in those days that comedy (whose province was humor and ridiculous matters only) was to represent things worse than the truth; history to describe the truth; but tragedy was to invent things better than the truth.[2]

While Rymer is usually closer to the *Poetics* than are the French formalists, he never considered himself (nor was he) a dissenter from the doctrines of Rapin, Le Bossu, or Racine. He thoroughly approves of the minor 'unities' of Time and Place, and is in favor of restoring the tragic Chorus. He believes that the French dramatists may prove the saviors of modern tragedy:

What reformation may not we expect, now that in France they see the necessity of a Chorus to their tragedies? Boyer and Racine, both of the Royal Academy, have led the dance; they have tried the success in the last plays that were presented by them.

The Chorus was the root and original, and is certainly always the most necessary part of tragedy.

The Spectators thereby are secured that their poet shall not juggle, or put upon them in the matter of Place and Time, other than is just and reasonable for the representation.[3]

Aristotle maintains that Spectacle is the least artistic part of a drama, having least to do with the art of poetry, and Rymer that

[1] Rymer, *A Short View of Tragedy*, pp. 86–7; Spingarn 2.219.
[2] Rymer, *Tragedies of the Last Age*, p. 36.
[3] Rymer, *A Short View of Tragedy*, pp. 1–2; Spingarn 2.209.

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tragedy should be first of all poetry, good literature, with Spectacle a minor detail in the actual production. Audiences in the popular theatre, however, ignoring the highest qualities of tragedy, clamor for show, and get it:

> How many plays owe all their success to a rare show? Even in the days of Horace, enter on the stage a person in a costly, strange habit, Lord! what clapping, what noise and thunder, as heaven and earth were coming together! yet not one word spoken. . . .
>
> It matters not whether there be any plot, any characters, any sense, or a wise word from one end to the other, provided in our play we have the Senate of Rome, the Venetian Senate in their pontificalibus, or a blackamoor ruffian, or Tom Dove, or other four-legged hero of the Bear-Garden.[1]

Aristotle and Horace judged the drama according to literary standards, though Aristotle took into account the actual production in a theatre. So long as Rymer confined his Aristotelian and Horatian criticism to the classical plays that have survived, he was well within his rights; but when he attacked modern English dramas, not only the popular favorites from Shakespeare and from Beaumont and Fletcher, but current productions on the popular stage, he overstepped the bounds of reason. In spite of indignant protests from sensible men like Dryden and Butler, however, his efforts (coupled with the orthodox criticism of the French) made a deep impression upon his fellow-Englishmen. Rymer did more than any other man to establish in England the Aristotelian criticism of tragedy, with the test of Fable, Character, Thought, and Expression—legitimately applicable, in his mind, not only to *Oedipus Rex*, or to avowed literary imitations of the ancient drama, but to any serious play that appeared upon the English stage. No English critic has been more heartily condemned, it is true, but he had his supporters; others besides John Dennis honestly believed that Rymer was a critic who, 'notwithstanding the rage of all the poetasters of the times,

[1] Rymer, *A Short View of Tragedy*, pp. 2–3; Spingarn 2.209–210. Cf. pp. 8–9. Spingarn 2.213.

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whom he has exasperated by opening the eyes of the blind that they may see their errors, will always pass with impartial posterity for a most learned, a most judicious, and a most useful critic.'[1]

From the tone of his attack on Rymer[2] we see that Dryden was not a faithful servant of Aristotle. A zealous admirer of the *Poetics*, nevertheless he did not agree with all the Aristotelian doctrines. In the first place, he was under the spell of Horace; secondly, his criticism was too much colored by the didactic, moralizing worship of heroic poetry in the French writers; and, finally, his earnest partriotism would not let him accept, unquestioned, standards of dramatic art that were founded upon Greek and Roman drama, especially when he was himself a popular playwright.

There is a marked Horatian influence throughout Dryden's critical writings, from the *Essay of Dramatic Poesy* (1668) to the *Preface to the Fables* (1700). He believes that the criticisms of Horace are the 'most instructive of any that are written in this art',[3] although he realizes that Horace was a follower of the Aristotelian school of criticism. In fact, Dryden makes the unlikely, but then traditional, assumption that Horace himself studied the *Poetics* at first hand:

> Of that book which Aristotle has left us, Περὶ τῆς Ποιητικῆς, Horace his *Art of Poetry* is an excellent comment, and I believe, restores to us that Second Book of his concerning Comedy, which is wanting in him.[4]

'Aristotle with his interpreters, and Horace and Longinus, are the authors to whom I owe my lights,'[5] he says; of these, Horace was the most familiar to him. Horace he got direct, but his knowledge of Aristotle and 'Longinus' was usually borrowed from France.

[1] Dennis, *An Essay on the Genius and Writings of Shakespear*, London, 1712, pp. 41–2.
[2] See above, p. 60.
[3] Dryden, Preface to *Sylvae* (1685), in *Essays of John Dryden*, ed. by W. P. Ker, Oxford, 1926, 1.266.
[4] *Ibid.* 1.38.
[5] *Ibid.* 1.207.

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Dacier's edition of the *Poetics* appeared in 1692. Dryden mentions the work with approval in 1695,[1] but from the way in which he quotes Greek words and phrases from the *Poetics* in the *Essay of Dramatic Poesy*[2] it looks as if he made the acquaintance of some Greek text at a much earlier date. The French influence was too strong, however, and, aside from a decided touch of Scaliger, Dryden for the most part was content to follow Rapin, Le Bossu, Dacier, and Corneille in his interpretation of Aristotle. The influence of Corneille is especially strong in Dryden's early works. In the Prologue to *Secret Love, or the Maiden Queen* (1668), he says:

> He who writ this, not without pains and thought,
> From French and English theatres has brought
> Th' exactest rules, by which a play is wrought.
>
> The Unities of Action, Place, and Time;
> The scenes unbroken; and a mingled chime
> Of Johnson's humor, with Corneille's rhyme.[3]

In the same year, 1668, he says in his *Defence of an Essay of Dramatic Poesy:*

> I have that veneration for Aristotle, Horace, Ben Jonson, and Corneille, that I dare not serve him [Sir Robert Howard] in such a cause, and against such heroes, but rather fight under their protection.[4]

The heroic couplet was not the only thing Dryden picked up from the French dramatist.

As a popular playwright, it was only natural for Dryden, like both Jonson and Corneille, to refuse to accept all the Aristotelian doctrines, and natural that he should fall into inconsistencies with those he did accept. It is not strange to find him praising the 'rules' in one place, and rebelling against them in another,

[1] Dryden, in Ker, 2.136.
[2] *Ibid.* 1.46, 86. Dryden changes the gender of Aristotle's ὁ μῦθος to τὸ μῦθος; but he often makes mistakes in his dealings with the *Poetics*.
[3] Dryden, in Ker 1.109.
[4] *Ibid.* 1.122.

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just as he at times extols the didactic function of poetry, and then confesses that his 'chief endeavors are to delight the age in which I live.'[1] Nor is it strange to find him in his admirable tragedy, *All for Love* (1678), trying to 'follow the practice of the ancients, who, as Mr. Rymer has judiciously observed, are, and ought to be, our masters,'[2] as regards the structure, and at the same time imitating the 'divine' Shakespeare in his style. Later he frankly abandons the strict classical, or neo-classical, form, and for the sake of variety returns to the looser Elizabethan construction of the double plot, also freely intermingling comic scenes with tragic. Witness, for example, his *Spanish Friar, or the Double Discovery* (1681),[3] and *Don Sebastian* (1690).

Dryden, then, from the outset was necessarily inconsistent in his criticism. It will be impossible to consider all the theories in his voluminous writings, but perhaps we can assemble in fairly brief compass his more important expressions of Aristotelian doctrine.

From first to last, from the Epistle Dedicatory of *The Rival Ladies* (1664) to the *Preface to the Fables* (1700), with the authority of Aristotle and Horace and the examples of Ben Jonson and Corneille, Dryden maintains that poetry (including the drama) is a representative imitation of Nature and of human action. He holds to the Aristotelian concept that men naturally delight in imitation,[4] and that artistic treatment is merely idealized imitation: the poet's business is first of all imitation of Nature; but not only must he successfully imitate—his imitation must be heightened with 'all the arts and ornaments of poesy.'[5]

[1] Dryden discusses the aim of poetry in many places. The best examples are to be found in the *Defence of an Essay of Dramatic Poesy*, the Preface to *Troilus and Cressida*, the *Discourse concerning the Original and Progress of Satire*, and *A Parallel of Poetry and Painting*. See Ker 1.113, 116, 142–3, 209–10; 2.87, 112, 128.

[2] *Ibid.* 1.200.

[3] See Dryden's Dedication, *ibid.* 1.249.

[4] *Ibid.* 1.92–3.

[5] *Ibid.* 1.113; cf. 2.136–7.

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Since poetry is idealized imitation, it aims, not at literal truth, or historical fact, but at poetic truth.[1] The poet above all should aim at probability:

'T is not necessary that there should be historical truth in it [tragedy]; but always necessary that there be a likeness of truth, something that is more than barely possible; *probable* being that which succeeds, or happens, oftener than it misses. To invent therefore a probability, and to make it wonderful, is the most difficult undertaking in the art of poetry; for that which is not wonderful is not great, and that which is not probable will not delight a reasonable audience.[2]

Dryden's conception of organic unity, of the perfect whole, is essentially the same as Rymer's; it is still somewhat mechanical, too close to the French 'rules,' though in his Preface to *Troilus and Cressida* (*Containing the Grounds of Criticism in Tragedy*), by all odds his best treatment of Greek theory, he has an excellent discussion of Aristotle's *beginning, middle, and end.*[3] He believes that tragedy, should be an 'imitation of one entire, great, and perfect action.' He disapproves all double actions, all mixtures of comic and tragic elements in the same play, not hesitating to condemn his own efforts in *Marriage à la Mode*, though he prides himself upon his *Oedipus*[4] and his *All for Love*.[5]

In his theory Dryden emphasized the classical unity which Rymer so vehemently supported, and occasionally he practised it. As an active dramatist, however, engaged with the difficulties of pleasing a modern audience, Dryden's own inclinations more and more turned towards the methods of the Elizabethans, and to plays like his own *Spanish Friar*.

In his numerous discussions of the function of tragedy Dryden displayed most inconsistency, and at the same time offered some of his most brilliant and influential interpretations of Aristotelian

[1] Dryden, in Ker 1.185. Dryden has the stock references to Lucan, whose reputation was that of a historian rather than a poet. See Ker 1.11, 152.

[2] *Ibid.* 1.209.

[3] *Ibid.* 1.208.

[4] *Ibid.*

[5] *Ibid.* 1.192.

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theory. In the *Essay of Dramatic Poesy* he was still too much under the spell of the didactic French writers to reach beyond the usual 'pleasing admiration and concernment.'[1] In the Preface to *Troilus and Cressida* (1679), probably written after he had come under the influence of Rymer, he drew closer to the *Poetics*; in fact, his discussion there of the tragic function was the best interpretation of Aristotle's remarks an Englishman had yet offered.

Dryden's own definition of tragedy runs as follows:

> It is an imitation of one entire, great, and probable action; not told, but represented; which, by moving in us fear and pity, is conducive to the purging of those two passions in our minds.[2]

He is still didactic: the chief aim of tragedy is to instruct delightfully, to purge the passions by example; the tragic *catharsis* is a moral purification. There are, however, in Dryden, distinct signs of a 'pathological' interpretation, even as early as the *Essay of Dramatic Poesy*. 'Lisideius' compares the tragic poet to the physician who prescribes a purge; though here the purge is not strictly of the Aristotelian sort, since it arouses not so much pity and fear as admiration and compassion.[3] In the Preface to *Troilus and Cressida* Dryden agrees with Aristotle and Rapin that pity and fear are the proper tragic emotions, the only emotions moved in the audience by the poet.[4] In the Dedication of the *Aeneis* (1697), though here chiefly concerned with heroic poetry, Dryden admits that in dealing with the passions tragedy is more effective then the epic poem:

> The passions, as I have said, are violent; and acute distempers require medicines of a strong and speedy operation. Ill habits of the mind are like chronical diseases, to be corrected by degrees, and cured by alteratives; wherein, though purges are sometimes necessary, yet diet, good air, and moderate exercise have the greatest part.[5]

[1] Dryden, in Ker 1.53, 58.
[2] *Ibid.* 1.207.
[3] *Ibid.* 1.58.
[4] *Ibid.* 1.211, 220.
[5] *Ibid.* 2.160.

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Thus Dryden, like many another modern critic, presents both the moral and pathological interpretations of *catharsis;* but he clearly favors the customary moral one. His own belief is best expressed in a passage, often quoted, from the Dedication of the *Aeneis:*

To raise, and afterwards to calm, the passions—to purge the soul from pride, by the examples of human miseries which befall the greatest—in few words, to expel arrogance and introduce compassion, are the great effects of tragedy.[1]

Dryden's dramatic theory takes account of a comic *catharsis* as well, and it too is somewhat didactic, since comedy aims to reward virtue and punish vice; but here instruction is secondary, for the chief business of the comic poet is 'to make you laugh.'[2] Dryden abstracted his theory of comedy from the *Poetics;*[3] he repeatedly speaks of the comic drama as a representation of the actions of inferior persons.[4] But again, his own practice somewhat belied his theory, as, for example, in his most successful comedy, *Marriage à la Mode.*

Dryden's most conspicuous failure to live up to his theories lay in his treatment of the epic poem. Even while he was turning out successful plays for the fashionable stage he longed to write a great heroic poem, perhaps on the noble subject of King Arthur, or on that of the Black Prince.[5] The desire was but natural, for the great French critics were extolling the epic poem above all other forms of literature; the latter half of the seventeenth century was the 'heroic age.' In his essay *Of Heroic Plays,* prefixed to the *Conquest of Granada* (1672), Dryden explains how Ariosto inspired him with the idea that a 'heroic play ought to be an imitation in little of an heroic poem.'[6] Thus he solaced himself with the thought that he was employing the epic method even on the stage.

[1] Dryden, in Ker 2.158.
[2] See Dryden's Preface to *An Evening's Love, or the Mock Astrologer* (1671), *ibid.* 1.143.
[3] See Dryden's *Parallel of Poetry and Painting* (1695), *ibid.* 2.126.
[4] *Ibid.* 1.135–6, 143, 209; 2.132.
[5] *Ibid.* 2.38.
[6] *Ibid.* 1.150.

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In his *Apology for Heroic Poetry* (1677) Dryden proclaims that 'heroic poetry . . . has ever been esteemed, and ever will be, the greatest work of human nature; in that rank has Aristotle placed it.'[1] Afterwards, when Dryden had given up writing heroic plays, he came to know the *Poetics* much better; but his opinions of the relative merits of epic poetry and tragedy evidently remained unaltered. He gave up writing plays like the *Conquest of Granada*, not from any agreement with Aristotle's belief that the tragic form is more artistic than the epic, but from weariness of the monotonous couplet and a new admiration for Shakespeare's verse. Dryden's fellow-countrymen finally grew tired of listening to bombastic braggarts like the intrepid Almanzor. George Villiers staggered heroic tragedy with his *Rehearsal* in 1671, though it remained for Fielding to deliver the death-blow in 1730 with *Tom Thumb*. Dryden, however, always believed that the epic poem was the highest achievement in poetry. In the Dedication of the *Aeneis* (1697) he points out that the original of drama lay in the epic, and that Aristotle's criticism was in large part based on the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*.[2] When all is said for it, tragedy, to him, remains the 'minature of human life—an epic poem is the draught at length.'[3] Thus he consistently takes exception to Aristotle's preference of tragedy,[4] and is in thorough agreement with Rapin and the moral Le Bossu that the 'heroic poem, truly such, is undoubtedly the greatest work which the soul of man is capable to perform.'[5]

As we have seen, Dryden seldom could make his theory harmonize with his practice. He admired and extolled the epic poem above tragedy, yet was forced to admit that while the ancients ex-

[1] Dryden, in Ker 1.181.

[2] *Ibid.* 2.156; cf. 2.43.

[3] *Ibid.* 2.157.

[4] *Ibid.* 2.158: 'It is one reason of Aristotle's to prove that tragedy is the more noble because it turns in a shorter compass; the whole action being circumscribed within the space of four-and-twenty hours. He might prove as well that a mushroom is to be preferred before a peach, because it shoots up in the compass of a night.'

[5] *Ibid.* 2.154. Cf. Rymer, *Monsieur Rapin's Reflections*, p. 77.

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celled the moderns in epic poetry, in tragedy the modern writers, Shakespeare in particular, held the palm. He would rather have written a good heroic poem than the best tragedy; yet he gave up heroic plays in disgust, and made no nearer approach to the true epic than his translation of Virgil's *Aeneid*.

On the Aristotelian analysis of tragedy, Dryden never reached the clarity or the consistency of Rymer,[1] though his remarks probably have been even more influential than Rymer's. In the *Essay of Dramatic Poesy* Dryden adopts Scaliger's, not Aristotle's, mechanical division of a play into Protasis, Epitasis, Catastasis, and Catastrophe.[2] 'Neander's' examination of Jonson's *Silent Woman* follows the French method, which mainly deals with the three unities. But in the Preface to *Troilus and Cressida*—and here again we must infer the influence of Rymer—Dryden presents an elaborate Aristotelian treatment of Plot and Manners, neglecting the remaining parts of Thoughts and Expression only from lack of space.

Dryden always insists upon the primary importance of Plot as the soul of drama, the 'foundation of the play.'[3] In the Preface to *Troilus and Cressida* he carefully distinguishes between the inner structure of a play, the form, or plot, which directly stirs the proper emotions (*i.e.*, pity and fear), and what he correctly terms the 'mechanic beauties of the plot, which are the observation of the three unities.'[4] Even before this, in the *Essay of Dramatic Poesy*, 'Neander' favors the complex plot; he commends the elaborate contrivance of incidents in *The Silent Woman*, and the admirable untying (λύσις) of the action.[5] Dryden's own use of the complex plot, however, is less successful. Both Discoveries in his *Spanish Friar, or the Double Discovery* belong to what Aristotle would term the poorest type. Dryden's inconsistency as a dramatic

[1] In his remarks on Rymer, Dryden speaks of the Fable, Manners, Thoughts, Words, as characteristic parts of tragedy. See Johnson, *Lives of the English Poets* 1.472–3.
[2] See Dryden, in Ker 1.45.
[3] *Ibid.* 1.213.
[4] *Ibid.* 1.212.
[5] *Ibid.* 1.86.

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poet, however, does not mean that he was not in sympathy with Aristotle's emphasis on the structure; though his sympathy provides another instance of the discrepancy between his 'modern' practice and his 'ancient' theory.

This discrepancy is not so prominent in Dryden's discussion of the tragic hero. Here again the best expression (at least the most Aristotelian) is in the Preface to *Troilus and Cressida*. Dryden often speaks of good tragic characters as necessarily noble persons, and in the Preface he offers a keen and comprehensive analysis of the qualities that should go to make up the ideal hero in tragedy. The poet must always keep in mind that pity and fear are the emotions to be aroused. We can feel pity only for a virtuous man. Dryden would not bar all villains from the tragic stage, but the hero should not be a villain; he must be mainly good. Yet, with an eye to Aristotle's 'tragic flaw' (ἁμαρτία), Dryden insists that the hero should not be perfect:

> The chief character or hero in a tragedy, as I have already shown, ought in prudence to be such a man who has so much more of virtue in him than of vice that he may be left amiable to the audience, which otherwise cannot have any concernment for his sufferings; and it is on this one character that the pity and terror must be principally, if not wholly, founded.[1]

Dryden felt that he had contributed a new consideration to the view of an ideal tragic hero. Certainly he did contribute the first accurate English interpretation, both in criticism and on the stage, of Aristotle's tragic personage. He admitted that his Oedipus[2] was probably too good a man for tragedy (*epic* heroes, to his mind, should be perfect); but he believed, with good reason, that he had struck the golden mean in his Antony.[3]

[1] Dryden, in Ker 1.216. Just before this statement Dryden had said that there are 'alloys of frailty to be allowed for the chief persons, yet so that the good which is in them shall outweigh the bad, and consequently leave room for punishment on the one side and pity on the other.' Cf. *ibid.* 1.210–11.

[2] *Ibid.* 2.146. John Dennis later shows the inferiority of the modern character to Sophocles' Oedipus. See below, p. 89.

[3] *Ibid.* 1.191.

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For some of the minor 'Aristotelian' doctrines we have undertaken to discuss, the *Essay of Dramatic Poesy* offers the best material. There Dryden expresses a qualified approval of the three Unities. He mentions the Unity of Time as the compass of a natural day, that is, twenty-four hours,[1] and the Unity of Place he correctly assigns to the French 'rules,' not to Aristotle or Horace.[2] In the *Defence of an Essay of Dramatic Poesy* Dryden defends the Unities against the attacks of Sir Robert Howard; but his view is essentially one of moderation. He admits that the French plays are more regular, but praises the English plays for their variety. *All for Love* is his own best contribution to the neo-classical stage, and he suspects that it is more regular than the English stage requires, for, much as he admires the Greek dramatists, he believes that their plays are too small in compass to serve as models for the modern theatre.

Dryden evidently did not hold with the French critics and Rymer that the Chorus was a necessary part of tragedy. He dispensed with it in his own *Oedipus* (done in collaboration with Lee), a curious mixture of all extant Greek and Roman versions of the story; and there is no Chorus in *All for Love*, which is otherwise strictly 'classical' in its structure.

The critical writings of Dryden, uneven as they are in quality, furnish the most intelligent view of the great struggle in England at the close of the century between the artificial neo-classicism of Italy and France and the natural romantic tendencies of men who refused to bow to the yoke of uncompromising Aristotelians. Dryden leaned towards the Greeks in theory, if not in practice, but even in his theory he was by no means uncompromising. Perhaps he was too ready to compromise. He hesitated to be too *regular*, yet would not be too *irregular*. He had to be loyal to the great traditions of his native English drama; but he could not help admiring the classical reasonableness of Aristotle and Horace. Though he saw clearly enough that the true Aristotle of

[1] See Dryden, in Ker 1.38–9. Cf. *ibid.* 2.157.
[2] *Ibid.* 1.48.

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the *Poetics* did not lie in the French 'rules,' he was forced to admire the beautiful creations of Corneille and Racine when they followed the 'rules.' At best his position was unsatisfactory. Was he in a worse predicament, however, than many English critics who have followed him in the past two hundred years?

Dryden is sincere in his Preface to *Troilus and Cressida* when he quotes from Rapin to show his attitude towards the Aristotelian-Horatian theory of poetry:

> If the rules be well considered, we shall find them to be made only to reduce Nature into method, to trace her step by step, and not to suffer the least mark of her to escape us; 't is only by these that probability in fiction is maintained, which is the soul of poetry. They are founded upon good sense and sound reason, rather than on authority; for though Aristotle and Horace are produced, yet no man must argue that what they write is true because they writ it; but 't is evident, by the ridiculous mistakes and gross absurdities which have been made by those poets who have taken their fancy only for their guide that, if this fancy be not regulated, it is a mere caprice and utterly incapable to produce a reasonable and judicious poem.[1]

Dryden's humane moderation was more attractive to his fellow-Englishmen than was the strict, uncompromising attitude of Rymer, who would raise Aristotle to the seat of absolute judgment. For the learned contemporaries of Dryden and Rymer, and for some of the less learned but more successful playwrights of the day, Dryden and not Rymer set the standards of criticism.

The Frenchman Saint-Évremond, who lived in England from 1660 until his death in 1703, was a critic who rivaled Dryden in popularity. His critical essays, translated in 1692, reveal an attitude towards the *Poetics* similar to Dryden's, respectful but by no means slavish. 'Il faut convenir que la *Poétique* d'Aristote est un excellent ouvrage; cependant il n'y a rien d'assez parfait pour

[1] Dryden, in Ker 1.228–9. Cf. Rymer, *Monsieur Rapin's Reflections*, pp. 17–8. The words are taken from Rapin, but express Dryden's own beliefs. It is true that Dryden owes most of his classical theory to the French; yet the literary debt is not all on one side. It is said that Rapin learned English on purpose to read Dryden. See Sir Walter Scott's *Life of Dryden*, in *Works of John Dryden*, ed. by Scott and Saintsbury, Edinburgh, 1882, 1.394.

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régler toutes les nations et tous les siècles.'[1] Saint-Évremond's chief title to fame in Aristotelian circles was his re-introduction into England of 'admiration' as one of the passions proper to tragedy. We have seen that Sir Philip Sidney, probably following Minturno and Scaliger, put 'admiration' among the functions of tragedy with more than a hint that he also thought of it as a tragic emotion.[2] There was good reason for neo-classicists who connected admiration with tragic as well as epic poetry; Aristotle himself says that the epic poem affords more opening for the improbable, but that the 'marvelous' (*τὸ θαυμαστόν*) has a place in tragedy.[3] Since the common Renaissance interpretation of *τὸ θαυμαστόν* was 'admiration,' Le Bossu[4] and many others assumed that admiration was the distinguishing mark of the epic poem. Corneille, in the Examen of his *Nicomède* (1651), treats it as one of the tragic emotions:

Dans l'admiration qu'on a pour sa vertu, je trouve une manière de purger les passions dont n'a point parlé Aristote, et qui est peut-être plus sûre que celle qu' il prescrit à la tragédie par le moyen de la pitié et de la crainte.

Corneille, Boileau,[5] and Saint-Évremond (all three possibly indebted to Vossius[6]) were mainly instrumental in adding admiration to the pity and fear of tragedy. Dryden followed suit in his *Essay of Dramatic Poesy*,[7] though he later came to see that Aristotle regarded pity and fear as the only true tragic emotions. Saint-Évremond, if he did not do the most to establish the theory, at least gives himself credit for the innovation:

Je finirai par un sentiment hardi et nouveau: c' est qu' on doit rechercher à la tragédie, devant toutes choses, une grandeur

[1] Saint-Évremond, *Critique Littéraire*, ed. by Maurice Wilmotte, Paris, 1921, p. 106.

[2] See above, p. 28. Cf. Spingarn, *History of Literary Criticism in the Renaissance*, pp. 52–3.

[3] See *Poetics* 1460 a 11–18.

[4] See Le Bossu, *Treatise of the Epick Poem* 2.56.

[5] For Boileau's view see Gregory Smith, *Elizabethan Critical Essays* 1.392–3.

[6] Vossius connects the *admirable* with *pity* and *fear*. See his *Poeticarum Institutionum Libri Tres* 2.64–5.

[7] See above, p. 67.

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d'âme bien exprimée, qui excite en nous une tendre admiration. Il y a dans cette sorte d'admiration quelque ravissement pour l'esprit; le courage y est élevé, l' âme est touchée.[1]

The attitude of Dryden towards classical criticism was reflected in the uncertain opinions of the minor critics at the close of the century—Gerard Langbaine and Sir Thomas Pope Blount, for example. Langbaine, in his *Account of the English Dramatic Poets* (1691), professes a deep respect for the regular drama, but his admiration for Shakespeare will not allow him to condemn the 'irregular.' He apparently believes that Shakespeare, had he read Aristotle and Rapin,[2] would have written better plays, and that Dryden, with his superior equipment, should have done better than he did. Blount's two attempts at criticism, *De Re Poetica* and *Characters and Censures of the most Considerable Poets whether Ancient or Modern, extracted out of the Best and Choicest Critics* (both published in 1694), contain scarcely an original thought, although the author displays a wide reading of the standard critics, Scaliger, Vossius, Rapin, Rymer, and Dryden. For the interpretation of Aristotle himself, Blount does little beyond increasing the prestige of the *Poetics* with a somewhat illogical statement: 'That most incomparable piece of his [Aristotle's] concerning the *Art of Poetry*, which by all the world is counted the best model for poets to follow, may well allow him to be ranked amongst the most considerable poets.'[3]

Through the efforts of Dryden and Rymer, and Saint-Évremond, to say nothing of the ever-popular writers of France, literary criticism at the close of the century had become a serious pursuit with scholars, and a fashionable pastime with nearly all literary men. Many questions that perplexed Dryden soon became subjects for open debate and even fierce literary combat; though the English writers seldom were so wrought up over 'ancient' and 'modern' as their more critical French neighbors. In the English

[1] Saint-Évremond, *Critique Littéraire*, p. 118.
[2] See Langbaine, pp. 142 ff.; Spingarn 3.119 ff.
[3] Blount, *Characters and Censures*, pp. 15–16. George Farquhar vehemently disagrees with any such view in his *Discourse of Comedy;* see below, p. 93.

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campaign of the famous war between the Ancients and Moderns the combatants were not specifically concerned with poetry or drama, for even the noisiest of the Moderns seemed to feel that in that quarter the fortifications of the Ancients were well-nigh impregnable. The Ancients, therefore, felt no pressing need to defend Aristotle's theories of poetry, though some of them, Sir William Temple, for instance, sensibly pointed out that the modern French 'pretenders' had detracted from rather than added to the valuable doctrines of Aristotle and Horace; the commentators should have stopped with simple translation.[1] William Wotton, a champion of the Moderns, and a far better scholar than Temple, answered the Ancients in 1694 with his *Reflections upon Ancient and Modern Learning*, a masterly treatment of the progress of learning up to the end of the seventeenth century. In poetry, however, Wotton felt that the advantage lay with the Greeks, who established the principles of the art.[2]

Not less famous than the battles of the Ancients and Moderns, and of a greater practical consequence, was the quarrel over the 'immorality and profaneness' of the Restoration stage. Both parties in this lively affair sought support from the great authority on the drama, Aristotle.[3] In 1695 Sir Richard Blackmore inveighed against the extreme license of contemporary

[1] See Temple, *Of Poetry*, in Spingarn 3.83. But Temple himself did not escape the opinions of the French commentators. He believed, for example, that the chief end of poetry is moral instruction, the moderation of all violent passions. See *ibid.* 3.89.

[2] Wotton, in Spingarn 3.206: 'Thus Aristotle framed rules of epic poesy from Homer.' Cf. *ibid.* 3.203.

Richard Bentley, the greatest scholar of his generation in England, and profoundly learned in Greek poetry, seems not to have been particularly interested in Aristotelian criticism. Both Bentley and Charles Boyle, however, in their disputes over the Epistles of Phalaris, have recourse to the *Poetics* when questions of ancient drama arise. See Bentley, *Works*, ed. by Dyce, London, 1836–8, 1.246–51, 284, 312, 324–5, 332–3, 340, 351; Boyle, *Dr. Bentley's Dissertations on the Epistles of Phalaris, and the Fables of Aesop* (2nd. ed.), London, 1698, pp. 141, 172–7, 46, 227.

[3] Even William Wycherley, who doubtless cared little for the opinions of scholars, does not neglect to mention Aristotle and the 'rules.' See the Dedication of his *Plain-Dealer* (1677?): 'I can hardly keep myself from quoting Aristotle and Horace, and talking to you of the rules of writing (like the French authors), to show you and my reader I understand 'em, in my epistle, lest neither of you should find it out by the play.'

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comedy, in the Preface to *Prince Arthur*. Three years later a more redoubtable champion of reform arose in the person of Jeremy Collier, whose *Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the Stage* (1698) roused the defenders of the theatre to action. As to Aristotle, Collier was against him, since the ancient critic was one of the theatrical party; but Collier was familiar with the *Poetics*, and, of course, with Rapin and the other commentators of the day. He made good use of the Unities, and of the formal examination of a play by Fable, Moral, Manners, and Thoughts.[1] Collier, if a bigoted reformer, was no fool. In fact, he was a very learned man, well able to cope with his antagonists. When the defenders of the stage brought forward Aristotle, as they repeatedly did, Collier was more than ready to meet them on their own ground.

William Congreve was the first spokesman of the theatrical party when he replied to Collier with *Amendments of Mr. Collier's False and Imperfect Citations* (1698). At the very start he summons Aristotle to his aid:

> Comedy (says Aristotle) is an imitation of the worse sort of people, μίμησις φαυλοτέρων, *imitatio pejorum*. He does not mean the worse sort of people in respect to their quality, but in respect to their manner.[2]

Collier retaliated in 1699 with his *Defence of the Short View*, where he questions Congreve's interpretation of μίμησις φαυλοτέρων, maintaining that Aristotle meant the 'middle sort of people.'[3] In the same year, 1699, James Drake rallied to Congreve's aid with the *Antient and Modern Stages surveyed, or Mr. Collier's View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage set in a True Light*; in this he makes valiant use of Aristotle and his chief interpreter, Dacier, to rout the formidable Collier.[4] But Collier refused to be routed. In a *Second Defence of the Short View* (1700)

[1] See Collier, *Short View*, pp. 150, 209 ff., 228 ff.
[2] Congreve, *Amendments*, pp. 7–8.
[3] See Collier, *Defence of the Short View*, pp. 6–7. Cf. *A Letter to Mr. Congreve on his pretended Amendments*, etc. London, 1698, p. 9.
[4] See Drake, pp. 36, 115, 192, 263 ff.

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he crushed Drake's Aristotelian arguments in masterly fashion, clearly demonstrating that most of the learning was on Collier's side.[1]

A significant feature of that famous theatrical quarrel is the use both parties make of classical criticism and Aristotle. Apparently no one among the reformers or among the supporters of the stage thought of objecting to the 'rules';[2] each group felt sure that Aristotle and the other authorities would support their side. William Congreve, for example, purposely strove to make his comedies conform to the best traditions of the drama. In the Dedication of his *Double-Dealer* (1694) he speaks with some pride of the pains he has taken to make his play *regular:*

> I made the plot as strong as I could, because it was single; and I made it single because I would avoid confusion, and was resolved to preserve the three Unities of the Drama.

By the time he came to write *The Way of the World* (1700) Congreve appears to have been completely won over to the strictest classical standards. In his Dedication he professes to emulate the correctness of Terence, disdaining the coarser strokes of Plautus. Terence was the best dramatist to follow, for he followed Menander, who followed Theophrastus, who was the disciple and immediate successor of Aristotle, the 'first and greatest judge of poetry.'

By the end of the century classical criticism was common material for polite conversation in London. The names of Aristotle and Horace, together with the more popular of their modern commentators, were not confined to the disputes of scholars or to the evening discussions at the coffee-houses; they rolled glibly off the tongues of fashionable ladies in the smartest drawing-

[1] See Collier, *Second Defence of the Short View*, pp. 19–20, 75–6, 81–3.
A much better match for Collier, as far as knowledge of classical criticism went, was John Dennis, who attacked Collier in a work entitled *Usefulness of the Stage to the Happiness of Mankind, to Government, and to Religion*, London, 1698.

[2] Even Colley Cibber adopts the conventional praise of moral instruction in the drama. See *An Apology for the Life of Mr. Colley Cibber*, London, 1740, (2nd. ed.), p. 218.

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rooms. Witness that delightful scene in the *Double-Dealer* (Act 2, Scene 1) where Brisk and Lord and Lady Froth are discussing Lady Froth's venture into heroic poetry:

BRISK. Deuce take me, if your ladyship has not the art of surprising the most naturally in the world—I hope you 'll make me happy in communicating the poem.

LADY FROTH. O, you must be my confident, I must ask your advice.

BRISK. I 'm your humble servant, let me perish—I presume your ladyship has read Bossu?

LADY FROTH. O yes, and Rapin and Dacier upon Aristotle and Horace.

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CHAPTER III

THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

The eighteenth century in England was far more positively critical than the seventeenth. The increasing vogue of the French writers, the pioneer work of Dryden and Rymer in dramatic criticism, and the great war of the Ancients and Moderns, all served to focus attention upon critical problems. Almost every one became a critic. Dedicatory epistles, prefaces, advertisements, apologies, announcing the author's own standards, appeared in all forms of writing, from conventional neo-classical plays to the new novel. Some of the most famous critics—Addison, Pope, and Samuel Johnson, for example—became literary dictators.

Yet the various authorities reached no satisfactory agreement on the correct standards of literary art; the Ancients and Moderns were still at odds over the relative merits of Homer and Milton, Sophocles and Shakespeare; the modern rebels still repudiated the French 'rules.' But the eighteenth-century combatants usually knew whereof they spoke: the upholder of Aristotle had read the *Poetics*, occasionally in Greek; the patriotic admirer of Shakespeare had an acquaintance with the classical laws of the drama he rejected, if not an understanding of them. The widespread knowledge of classical criticism, superficial though it usually was, naturally led to a more tolerant attitude in all, and consequently strengthened the position of Aristotle. Horace held his own, although 'Longinus' was rapidly becoming a pronounced rival to him. At the beginning of the century the few critics who did not take the classical doctrines for a real boon to progress had to accept them as a necessary ill. The general attitude towards Aristotle, both in France and England, is fairly represented by the decision of Apollo in François de Callières' *Characters and*

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Criticisms (translated by Captain Bladen in 1705). After a titanic struggle between the Ancients and Moderns, Apollo finally settles the dispute with a series of decrees. His decree on the future treatment of Aristotle runs as follows:

He maintains Aristotle in the reputation he has so justly acquired, for one of the most immense and sublime geniuses that ever lived. He orders that his excellent works shall continue to serve for rules to all the Moderns of good taste in every science and art they shall dissert upon, except his *Physics*, which they have the liberty to criticize upon as they shall think convenient.[1]

The literary atmosphere was more than ever charged with French dicta from Corneille, Racine, Rapin, Le Bossu, and Boileau, and a bold playwright occasionally ventured to adopt the independent attitude of Molière, who was always a favorite with the theatrical party. Englishmen, however, were not altogether dependent upon the French for their literary criticism. A Greek text of the *Poetics*, with the Latin after Goulston, and with notes from Heinsius and Sylburg, was issued at Cambridge in 1696 by James Upton. But more important, as far as general influence went, was the English adaptation (for the most part a close translation) of Dacier's French version of the *Poetics*. First appearing in 1705, it became so popular that two more issues followed, one in 1709 and one in 1714—emphatic testimony to the widespread interest in Aristotle as a critic. This English version of Dacier remained the standard English text of the *Poetics* until the anonymous translation of 1775.[2]

So general was the acquaintance with neo-classical criticism in the eighteenth century that Aristotelian allusions and quotations became the rule rather than the exception. Any attempt, therefore, to reckon with all the details of Aristotle's influence is virtually impossible. In the main, we shall confine ourselves to the more important critics, the successors of Sidney, Jonson, Milton, Dryden, and Rymer.

[1] Callières, *Characters and Criticisms*, London, 1705, pp. 172–3.

[2] See J. W. Draper, *Aristotelian Mimesis in Eighteenth-Century England*, in *PMLA.* 36 (1921). 373.

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Among the younger wits who gathered about Dryden at Wills' Coffee-house was John Dennis (1657–1734), friend and disciple, and later a leading (if not a popular) critic in his own right. The reputation of Dennis has suffered much from the pens of abler contemporaries like Swift, Pope, and Steele; yet, in his own day, he generally passed for '*the* Critic.' Even by 1700, the year of Dryden's death, Dennis had become one of England's best-known men of letters.

After the liberal-minded master died, Dennis became more set in his ways, more conservative; his veneration for the 'rules' increased; he came into open conflict with the popular writers of the day, and the popular writers and others began to hold 'the Critic' up to ridicule, poking fun at his orthodoxy. In 1717 Lewis Theobald describes him as the butt of his contemporaries:

> The wags who see him [Dennis] sitting in a coffee-house brim full of Aristotle and Dacier, and in pain till he drops some of his learning among them, soon ease him of that burthen in order to impose a heavier one upon him by speaking well of his contemporaries.[1]

Probably Dennis did take his own notions of Aristotle too seriously. Five years before, in the Epistle Dedicatory of his *Essay on the Genius and Writings of Shakespear* (1712), he proclaimed: 'The Legislator of Parnassus wrote the laws of tragedy so exactly and so truly in reason and nature that succeeding critics have writ justly and reasonably upon that art no farther than they have adhered to their great master's notions.'[2]

Since many of the poets and critics in the early part of the century professed to follow the principles of Aristotle, Dennis had some right to subject them to the test of Aristotle, and of

[1] Quoted by H. G. Paul, *John Dennis, his Life and Criticism*, New York, 1911, p. 65, note.

[2] Cf. Dennis, *Reflections Critical and Satyrical upon a late Rhapsody called an Essay upon Criticism* (1711), p. 9: ' 'T is now between two and three thousand years since Aristotle wrote his *Morals*, his *Politics*, his *Rhetoric*, and his *Poetic*: and three of these are the very best of their kinds to this very day, and have infinitely the advantage of all those several thousand treatises that have been writ since.' The passage is also in Durham, *Critical Essays of the Eighteenth Century*, p. 225.

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Dacier, Dennis' favorite interpreter. But in so doing he brought down the enmity and ridicule of more than one powerful opponent. Pope[1] repeatedly made fun of Dennis; Swift[2] usually spoke slightingly of him. When Addison's *Cato* was hailed as a masterpiece of the 'regular' drama, obesrving all the proper rules, Dennis found means from Aristotle with which to rend the tragedy to pieces.[3] This scandalous violence against the great Addison could not pass unrebuked. A heavy counter-attack soon followed in the shape of a pamphlet (possibly written by Pope), *The Narrative of Doctor Robert Norris, concerning the Strange and Deplorable Frenzy of Mr. John Dennis, an Officer at the Custom-House.* There is a lively dialogue between the doctor and his patient. Dennis is the patient.

DOCT. Pray, sir, how did you contract this swelling?
DEN. By a criticism.
DOCT. A criticism! that's a distemper I never heard of.
DEN. 'S death, sir, a distemper! it is no distemper, but a noble art.[4]

It was Addison's *Cato* that brought on the distress. The doctor finally decides that the poor man is mad, but the patient objects:

DEN. Caitiffs, stand off; unhand me, miscreants! Is the man whose whole endeavors are to bring the town to reason mad? Is the man who settles poetry on the basis of antiquity mad? Dares any one assert there is a Peripetia in that vile piece that's foisted upon the town for a dramatic poem? That man is mad, the town is mad, the world is mad. See Longinus in my right hand, and Aristotle in my left: I am the only man among the moderns that support them.[5]

If we turn to Dennis himself, however, we soon see that he was no pedantic slave to the ancients. His first critical work, and

[1] See Pope, *Dunciad* 1.106; 2.239; 3.173 ff.
[2] Swift, *Tale of a Tub*, in *Prose Works*, ed. by Temple Scott, London, 1919, 1.71: 'Every true critic is a hero born, descending in a direct line, from a celestial stem by Momus and Hybris, who begat Zoilus, who begat Tigellius, who begat Etcaetera the elder; who begat Bentley, and Rymer, and Wotton, and Perrault, and Dennis; who begat Etcaetera the younger.'
[3] See Dennis, *Remarks upon Cato, a Tragedy*, London, 1713.
[4] *The Narrative of Doctor Robert Norris*, London, 1713, p. 13.
[5] *Ibid.*, p. 18.

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probably his best, *The Impartial Critic*, was published in 1693 as one of the numerous answers to Rymer's *Short View of Tragedy*. In 1693 Dennis was still a follower of Dryden, but not blind in his devotion to that master. On comparing Dryden's *Oedipus* with Sophocles' tragedy, he decided in favor of the Greek. Better than Rymer, and possibly as well as Dryden, he perceived the genius of Shakespeare. Thus he approached much nearer to the 'impartial critic' than most of his free-minded enemies.

Dennis, in *The Impartial Critic*, believes that Rymer's attempt to set up the 'Grecian' method would not reform, but rather ruin, the English drama. He is for observing the basic principles of Aristotle without trying to force the ancient forms upon the modern stage:

> FREEMAN. I am for observing the rules of Aristotle as much as any man living, as far as it can be done without re-establishing the ancient method. But because the ancients' tragedies had little love in them, that therefore ours must have little too—because the ancient tragedies had a Chorus, that therefore we must ridiculously ape them—this is what I cannot endure to hear of.[1]

To be sure, *The Impartial Critic* is the most sensible of the long array of critical writings from Dennis' pen; but much may be learned from every one of them, even from abusive passages in his bickerings with Steele. Dennis wrote many plays and poems, and his criticisms are legion. The most important for Aristotle's doctrines are *The Impartial Critic* (1693), in answer to Rymer; *Remarks on a Book, entituled Prince Arthur, an Heroic Poem* (1696), a destructive criticism of Blackmore's epic; *The Usefulness of the Stage to the Happiness of Mankind, to Government, and to Religion* (1698), in answer to Collier; *The Advancement and Reformation of Modern Poetry* (1701), a plea to raise modern poetry to the level of the ancient; *The Grounds of Criticism in Poetry* (1704); *An Essay on the Genius and Writings of Shakespear, with some Letters of Criticism to the Spectator* (1712); and *Remarks upon Cato, a Tragedy* (1713).

[1] Dennis, in Spingarn 3.180.

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Not so uncompromising an Aristotelian as Rymer, Dennis at the same time was more consistent in his support of the ancients than was Dryden. He was a diligent student of Aristotle's criticism, thoroughly familiar with the *Rhetoric* as well as the *Poetics*, and by no means content to rely solely upon French versions and commentaries. He was easily the best of the contemporary orthodox critics. Save for Addison and Johnson, Dennis probably contributed more to the establishment of Aristotle's method of criticism than any other English critic in the eighteenth century. Unfortunately, perhaps because he was tormented by his enemies, he soon became, like Rymer, a professed reformer of the English stage, a 'Grecian' reformer, who strove, both in his poetry and in his criticism, to give his native drama the qualities that distinguished the great drama of Athens.

Dennis holds the conventional notion that poetry is imitation of Nature.[1] He tries to clear up the confused interpretation of *mimesis* that had existed since Ben Jonson's day by carefully distinguishing between imitating an author and imitating an action —in other words, between copying another writer and inventing a Fable (Aristotle's meaning of *mimesis*). Thus Virgil imitates in the right way; but Blackmore, in *Prince Arthur*, merely imitates Virgil in the narrower sense.[2]

Dennis believes, with all good modern disciples of Aristotle, that poetry, both tragic and epic, is graver, more philosophical, more universal than history, and more delightful than philosophy.[3] He attacks Steele's highly successful play, *The Conscious Lovers*, for its failure to observe *probability*, a principle that is necessary to all drama, and pre-eminently necessary to comedy.[4]

Dennis strongly favors the classical ideas of form in poetry, and believes he understands them. He idolizes the perfect whole,

[1] See *The Impartial Critic*, in Spingarn 3.148; *The Advancement and Reformation of Poetry*, p. 23.

[2] See Dennis, *Remarks on Prince Arthur*, p. 14.

[3] See Dennis, *ibid.* pp. 39–40. Cf. the Preface to *The Grounds of Criticism in Poetry*.

[4] See Dennis, *Remarks on a Play called the Conscious Lovers, a Comedy*, London, 1723, pp. 14–15.

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the organic unity to be found in the best poetry of the Greeks. In his criticism he first of all emphasizes Unity of Action. A play, or a poem, in order to be a good work of art, must have a clear-cut beginning, middle, and end, without superfluous, irregular episodes, without digressions. Dennis believes that beauty lies in regularity. Therefore reason is rule and order, even in poetry. His heaviest indictment of modern practice is directed against the fashionable new opera, the Italian opera, most irregular of all drama, that is threatening the death of all poetry.[1] This wretched 'Gothic' opera is farthest removed from the beautiful simplicity of ancient tragedy. Since beauty and art lie in regularity, we must observe certain fundamental rules (the principles of Aristotle), or abandon ourselves to the lawless confusion of 'Gothic' irregularity:

> If the end of poetry be to instruct and reform the world, that is, to bring mankind from irregularity, extravagance, and confusion, to rule and order, how this should be done by a thing that is in itself irregular and extravagant, is difficult to be conceived.[2]

Loosely-constructed plays of the modern stage can only lead to a degeneration of taste and art.

Dennis is a capital example of the modern classicist, bitterly opposed to every thing 'Gothic'. He makes a valiant attempt, not altogether a vain one, to reconstruct the classical ideas of beauty and perfection in both epic and dramatic poetry.[3]

The best discussion by Dennis of the function of tragedy comes in *The Impartial Critic*. He follows Dacier in the interpretation of *catharsis*, and therefore brings in a touch of the pathological theory. Terror and compassion, the only emotions properly aroused by tragedy,[4] are raised and then purged in the spectator:

[1] See Dennis, *An Essay on the Italian Operas* (1706), in *Select Works of Mr. John Dennis*, London, 1718.

[2] Dennis, *The Grounds of Criticism in Poetry*, p. 5.

[3] The clearest statement of Dennis' classical position is in his Epistle Dedicatory to *The Advancement and Reformation of Modern Poetry*. Cf. *The Impartial Critic*, in Spingarn 3.193 ff.; *Remarks on Prince Arthur*, pp. 10–12.

[4] See Dennis, *Remarks on Prince Arthur*, p. 73.

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For as the humors in some distempered body are raised in order to the evacuating that which is redundant or peccant in them, so tragedy excites compassion and terror to the same end; for the play being over, an audience becomes serene again, and is less apt to be moved at the common accidents of life, after it has seen the deplorable calamities of heroes and sovereign princes.[1]

The interpretation of Dennis is essentially moral, however. Thus he says in his answer to Collier's attacks on the stage: 'Aristotle has declared that Tragedy, by exciting the passions, purges them, and reduces them to a just mediocrity, and is by consequence a promotor of virtue.'[2]

Noting the emphasis on the supernatural in 'Longinus' treatise *On the Sublime*,[3] Dennis conceives that good poetry is heightened by religious enthusiasm, and he easily applies the idea to the tragic *catharsis*: 'Terror and compassion, which are the reigning passions in tragedy, are heightened by religion. Tragedy, says Aristotle in his *Poetick*, is the imitation of an action which excites compassion and terror.'[4] The essential meaning of *catharsis*, for Dennis, was purification.

Dennis tries to uphold an Aristotelian ideal for comedy as well as tragedy. He sharply differentiates the respective functions of each of the three leading forms of poetry. As the chief force of tragedy must proceed from moving *compassion* and *terror* strongly, and the chief force of the epic poem from exciting *admiration* powerfully, so the chief force of comedy must consist in exciting *laughter*.[5] We can best examine Dennis on comedy in his *Defence of Sir Fopling Flutter*, written to vindicate Etheredge from the

[1] Dennis, in Spingarn 3.184–5.
The English translation of Dacier (*Aristotle's Art of Poetry*, London, 1709, p. 80) runs as follows: 'Tragedy is a true medicine which purges the passions, since it teaches the ambitious to moderate his ambition, the wicked to fear God, the passionate to restrain his anger, etc.; but 't is a very agreeable medicine, and works only by pleasure.'

[2] Dennis, *The Usefulness of the Stage*, p. 71.

[3] This treatise went through at least a dozen editions during the eighteenth century. See Alfred Rosenberg, *Longinus in England bis zum Ende des 18. Jahrhunderts*, Berlin, 1917.

[4] Dennis, *The Advancement and Reformation of Modern Poetry*, p. 67.

[5] See Dennis, *Original Letters, Familiar, Moral, and Critical*, London, 1721, p. 16.

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attacks of the *Spectator*. Dennis believes that instruction, as well as pleasure, is the end of comedy; but, since he holds that 'laughter is the life and the very soul of comedy,' he rebels against the popular notion that a comic play should set patterns for imitation. Comedy is a representation of common life, of ridiculous things:

> Can anything but ridicule be the proper subject of comedy? Has not Aristotle told us in the fifth chapter of his *Poetics* that comedy is an imitation of the very worst of men? Not the worst, says he, in every sort of vice, but the worst in the Ridicule.[1]

Thus, basing his study on the *Poetics*, Dennis arrived at the conclusion that the 'Ridicule' is the distinguishing mark of comedy. The idea was common enough in England during the eighteenth century, but one can hardly determine whether or not Dennis was chiefly responsible for its introduction. Fielding, who later shared the view, probably owed more to Ben Jonson than to Dennis.[2]

Though Dennis was chiefly interested in dramatic poetry, he had studied the writings of Rapin, Le Bossu, and 'Longinus' too long to escape the common belief that heroic poetry is the 'noblest invention of human wit.'[3] In *The Grounds of Criticism in Poetry* he repeatedly asserts that 'admiration' (the distinctive feature of the epic poem) is the greatest passion raised by poetry. He merely mentions, without refuting, Aristotle's preference of tragedy.[4]

Dennis pursued Aristotle's method of criticizing plays and poems, and applied it even more extensively than did Rymer. He showed wherein Blackmore's epic, *Prince Arthur*, fails in Plot, Characters, Sentiments, and Expression; and on similar grounds he condemned Addison's tragedy, *Cato*. Both tragedy and epic poetry had to conform to the laws laid down in the *Poetics*.

[1] Dennis, *A Defence of Sir Fopling Flutter*, London, p. 4; cf. p. 21. Cf. Dacier, *Aristotle's Art of Poetry* (1709), pp. 58–9.
[2] See below, p. 114.
[3] Dennis, Preface to *Miscellany Poems*, etc., London, 1693.
[4] See Dennis, *The Grounds of Criticism in Poetry*, p. 19.

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Of the various parts of tragedy the Fable is the most important, the very soul of the play;[1] and the correct formation of the Fable alone signifies the good poet. In no other element of his criticism is Dennis so consistently Aristotelian as in his treatment of dramatic structure. He found his inspiration and encouragement for writing *Iphigenia*[2] not so much in Euripides as in the *Poetics*, where Aristotle commends *Iphigenia in Tauris* as a model for tragedy, and in particular the excellent Discovery there of Iphigenia to Orestes.[3] Although Dennis adopts the conventional arrangement in five acts, he observes a classical simplicity in the plot. He will introduce no *Gothic* humors in a serious play:

> To give you wholesome, true, severe, delight
> With me the tragic Muse returns to-night.[4]

Dennis' conception of the ideal tragic hero is essentially that found in the *Poetics*. The chief character should be a good man, but not altogether virtuous, for he must have some failing in order to arouse both pity and fear. *Poetically* is not the same thing as *morally* good.[5] In *The Impartial Critic* 'Freeman' presents an acute comparison of Sophocles' Oedipus with Dryden's Oedipus. He points out that the faults of Dryden's hero are parricide and incest, both the unavoidable result of ignorance and not of the character's own volition. Sophocles, however, did not make such a mistake:

> The faults for which Oedipus suffers in Sophocles are his vain curiosity in consulting the oracle about his birth, his pride in refusing to yield the way in his return from that oracle, and his fury and violence in attacking four men on the road the very day after he had been forewarned by the oracle that he should kill his father.[6]

Dennis calls Cato in Addison's tragedy a poor hero; for he is a Stoic, and Stoics are entirely too calm, too dispassionate, to be

[1] See Dennis, *The Impartial Critic*, in Spingarn 3.181.
[2] See Dennis, Preface to *Iphigenia*, London, 1700.
[3] See *Poetics* 1455[a] 16–21.
[4] Dennis, Prologue to *Iphigenia*.
[5] See Dennis, *Remarks on Prince Arthur*, pp. 44 ff.
[6] Dennis, in Spingarn 3.163.

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good dramatic heroes. Dennis never forgets that the arousing of pity and fear (terror and compassion) is Aristotle's ultimate demand upon tragedy.

Staunch Aristotelian that he was, Dennis was not a stickler for all the 'rules.' He believed in simplicity of form, in close-knit structure, but did not insist upon the minor unities of Time and Place. In fact, he thought that some of the modern playwrights, in trying to keep within these narrow limits, went to the most absurd extremes.[1] Neither did he approve of the recent revival of the Chorus on the tragic stage, though he used a chorus of priests and priestesses in Act 5 of his *Iphigenia*. In the Introduction to *The Impartial Critic* he ventures to suggest that, while the Chorus might have had a necessary place on the Athenian stage, the change in religion and manners should rather banish it from the modern stage. 'Freeman' decries the restoration of the Chorus for the excellent reason that the plot, not a Chorus, should hold a play together.[2] When 'Beaumont' produces Rymer's arguments that the French have seen the necessity for restoring the Chorus, and have justified its restoration in the success of their latest plays, 'Freeman' very justly replies:

'T is very inexcusable in a man of science to make any conclusion from success. The French before now have damned a very good play, and consequently may like an ill one.[3]

As he grew older, Dennis grew more fixed and rigorous in his opinions, and more irascible in temper. Most of his quarrels—and he apparently was quarreling most of the time—centred upon Aristotle and classical criticism. He fought with Pope[4] and Addison,[5] and time and again engaged Steele in bitter controversy. Steele represented the Moderns, Dennis the Ancients. The tide of victory ran one way, and then another, with Dennis

[1] See Dennis, *Original Letters*, pp. 73–4.
[2] *Ibid.* 3.180 ff.
[3] Dennis, in Spingarn 3.180.
[4] See Dennis, *Reflections Critical and Satyrical upon a Late Rhapsody called an Essay upon Criticism*, London, 1711. Reprinted in Durham, pp. 212–253.
[5] See Dennis, *An Essay on the Genius and Writings of Shakespear: with Some Letters of Criticism to the Spectator*, London, 1712; *Remarks upon Cato, a Tragedy*, London, 1713.

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on the side of the minority, but waging a valiant fight.[1] In 1723 Dennis renewed his attacks on Steele with *Remarks on a Play called the Conscious Lovers*, in which he contended that the only entertaining scene in this deservedly popular comedy was one where the author unconsciously observed a rule of Aristotle's—that the Discovery should be immediately followed by the Catastrophe.[2] Steele, who was familiar with the *Poetics* in Dacier's version, retaliated with *The Censor Censured*, in which 'Dick Freeman' (Steele himself) declared that he had spent three years in touching and retouching his characters in order to make them conform to Aristotle's rule that the poet should describe them not as they really are but as they ought to be.[3]

Dennis had defended the stage against Collier in 1698. In 1726, though an old man, he rose to defend it, in accordance with Aristotle, against the attacks of William Law.[4]

So it goes. In spite of his many faults, his pedantry, his irascibility, his poor sense of humor, we must respect the tireless industry of the man. From the very outset he leaves no doubt in the mind of his readers that for him at least criticism is a most serious business:

> FREEMAN. Pleasantry! you may call it what you please, sir, but that pleasant way is by no means fit for a critic: a critic, whose business it is to instruct, should keep to the didactic style, as Aristotle, Longinus, and the French critics have done; for if a man is eternally laughing, how can I possibly fall into his opinion, who know not if he speaks in good earnest?[5]

No one can say that Dennis was not in good earnest. He devoted the best part of a long and toilsome life to literary criticism, fighting for what he considered the right standards of judgment

[1] Dennis berates Steele's disrespect for Aristotle in *Characters and Conduct of Sir John Edgar*, London, 1720. He is vigorously answered in the *Answer to a Whimsical Pamphlet*, London, 1720. Dennis scores again in the *Battle of the Authors lately fought in Covent-Garden*, London, 1720.

[2] See Dennis, pp. 4–5.

[3] See Steele, p. 6.

[4] See Dennis, *The Stage Defended from Scripture, Reason, Experience, and the Common Sense of Mankind for Two Thousand Years*, London, 1726.

[5] Dennis, *The Impartial Critic*, in Spingarn 3.157.

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—those of Aristotle. Without the tolerance of Dryden, but without the narrowness of Rymer, Dennis stood as the leading exponent of Aristotelian criticism in England during the early part of the century, a professional among a host of amateurs. If men in general hesitated to accept Aristotle's methods of criticism after Rymer ceased writing on the drama, they certainly did not after Dennis had hurled his last classical broadside.

We may be sure, however, that other rebels besides Steele arose to combat this 'company of foreigners, such as your Aristotles and Horace, your Homers and Virgils, and the like exotics who understood not one word of English.'[1] The playwrights especially were disturbed over the foreign invasion.

George Farquhar (1677–1707), the brilliant Irishman who did much with his new comedies to free the English drama from the narrow confines of fashionable London, added critical theory to practice with his *Discourse upon Comedy* in 1702. The year before, in the Prologue to *Sir Harry Wildair*, Farquhar had complained of the current rage for formal drama:

> Athenian rules must form an English piece,
> And Drury Lane comply with ancient Greece.
> Exactness only, such as Terence writ,
> Must please our masked Lucretias in the pit.
> Our youthful author swears he cares not a pin
> For Vossius, Scaliger, Hedelin, or Rapin. . . .
> Thus, then, the pit and boxes are his schools,
> Your air, your humor, his dramatic rules.

The attack on the authorities is more fully developed in the *Discourse upon Comedy*. A brilliant writer of dialogue, Farquhar was well-equipped for satirizing serious scholars and playwrights like Rymer and Dennis, who wrote according to Aristotle and his commentators. In the *Discourse* Farquhar describes the method of the scholar-playwright:

Pursuant therefore to his philosophical dictates, he first chooses a single plot, because most agreeable to the regularity of criticism,

[1] Dennis, *Battle of the Authors lately fought in Covent-Garden*, pp. 35–6.

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no matter whether it affords business enough for diversion or surprise. He would not for the world introduce a song or dance, because his play must be one entire action. We must expect no variety of incidents, because the exactness of his three hours won't give him time for their preparation. The Unity of Place admits no variety of painting and prospect, by which mischance perhaps we shall lose the only good scenes in the play. But no matter for that, this play is a regular play; this play has been examined and approved by such and such gentlemen, who are staunch critics and masters of art; and this play I will have acted. Look'ee, Mr. Rich, you may venture to lay out a hundred and fifty pound for dressing this play, for it was written by a great scholar and fellow of a college.[1]

Almost passionately Farquhar pleads with his fellow-writers and his audience to lay aside their veneration of antiquity, and to trust to their own genius and abilities. Why should Englishmen of the present day still be subject to Aristotle, who was an authority for Greek epic poetry and tragedy, but not for the modern drama? 'Then, above all men living, why should the poets be hoodwinked at this rate, and by what authority should Aristotle's rules of poetry stand so fixed and immutable?'[2]

The first half of the essay is a direct denial of Aristotle's authority. With good reason Farquhar objects to Aristotle's rule over English comedy, but he realizes the formidable task he has undertaken in his objections. Most critics in the early part of the eighteenth century feel lost without Aristotle and Horace to support their contentions.[3] Sensible as Farquhar's arguments are, he doubtless did more to break the 'rules' with his *Beaux' Stratagem* than he did with the *Discourse upon Comedy*.[4]

George Granville, Lord Lansdowne (1667–1735), has the temerity to suggest that modern poets, with their own excellent arbiters of taste, can now dispense with the ancient critics:

[1] Farquhar, in Durham, *Critical Essays of the Eighteenth Century*, p. 261.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 264.
[3] See Thomas Gordon, *The Humourist*, London, 1725, 2.119.
[4] Farquhar's bold statement that the 'rules of English comedy don't lie in the compass of Aristotle or his followers, but in the pit, box, and galleries,' aroused the highest indignation among the orthodox party of criticism. Charles Gildon answers Farquhar with his *Comparison between the Two Stages*, London, 1702, pp. 174–7.

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Roscommon first, then Mulgrave rose, like light,
To clear our darkness, and to guide our flight;
With steady judgment, and in lofty sounds,
They gave us patterns, and they set us bounds.
The Stagirite and Horace laid aside,
Informed by them, we need no foreign guide.[1]

But Lansdowne is no Farquhar. He still believes in *decorum* and the 'rules.' When he comes to write plays, he seems to pride himself upon a strict observance of the correct dramatic laws. The Prologue (written by Henry St. Johns) to his tragedy, *Heroick Love*, declares:

By written laws our author would be tried,
And writes as if Athenians should decide,
With Horace and the Stagirite for guide.
Applause is welcome, but too dearly bought,
Should we give up one rule those mighty masters taught.[2]

Pope, as a dictator of taste and criticism, pokes fun at Dennis and the strict followers of Aristotle in his *Essay on Criticism* (written in 1709, published in 1711):

Once on a time La Mancha's Knight, they say,
A certain bard encount'ring on the way,
Discours'd in terms as just, with looks as sage,
As e'er could Dennis, of the Grecian Stage,
Concluding all were desperate sots and fools
Who durst depart from Aristotle's rules.
Our author, happy in a judge so nice,
Produced his play, and begg'd the knight's advice;
Made him observe the Subject and the Plot,
The Manners, Passions, Unities; what not?
All which exact to rule were brought about,
Were but a combat in the lists left out.
'What! leave the combat out?' exclaims the knight.
'Yes, or we must renounce the Stagirite.'
'Not so, by Heaven! (he answers in a rage)
Knights, squires, and steeds must enter on the stage.'
'So vast a throng the stage can ne'er contain.'
'Then build a new, or act it in a plain.'

[1] Granville, *Upon Unnatural Flights in Poetry* (1701), in Spingarn 3.295.
[2] Granville, *Heroick Love, a Tragedy*, London, 1713.

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Thus critics of less judgment than caprice.
Curious, not knowing, not exact, but nice,
Form short ideas, and offend in Arts
(As most in Manners), by a love to parts.[1]

On the other hand, Pope himself easily falls into the conventional praise of the 'Stagirite':

The mighty Stagirite first left the shore,
Spread all his sails, and durst the deeps explore;
He steer'd securely, and discover'd far,
Led by the light of the Maeonian star.
Poets, a race long unconfin'd and free,
Still fond and proud of savage liberty,
Receiv'd his laws, and stood convinc'd 't was fit
Who conquer'd Nature should preside o'er Wit.[2]

Pope doubtless owed more to Horace than to Aristotle, but if he was not familiar with the *Poetics* itself, he had studied Rapin and Le Bossu.[3] When he comes to treat of Homer's *Iliad* in a critical way, he adopts Aristotle's method of examining Plot, Characters, Sentiments, and Diction.[4] First of all he takes up the Plot, or Fable: 'That which Aristotle calls the Soul of Poetry was first breathed into it by Homer.'[5]

Although he ridiculed the stricter exponents of classical criticism, Pope himself probably did as much as any one else to popularize the conventional standards of poetry.

Swift, however, bowed to no authority. He had small respect for the 'malignant deity' Criticism, or for her worshipers like

[1] In his Preface to the Edition of Shakespeare (1725) Pope objects to imposing Aristotelian rules upon Shakespeare. See *Eighteenth-Century Essays on Shakespeare*, ed. by D. Nichol Smith, Glasgow, 1903, p. 50.

[2] Pope, *Essay on Criticism* 3.86–93.

Joseph Warton says of the lines (*An Essay on the Genius and Writings of Pope*, 3rd. ed., London, 1772, 1.168): 'A noble and just character of the first and the best of critics! And sufficient to repress the fashionable and nauseous petulance of several impertinent moderns, who have attempted to discredit this great and useful writer.'

[3] See Joseph Spence, *Anecdotes*, London, 1820, pp. 193–4: 'He [Pope] named among other books he then read the criticisms of Rapin and Bossu; and these might be what led him to write his *Essay on Criticism*.'

[4] See Pope, Preface to the Translation of the *Iliad* (1715), in Durham, pp. 323–354.

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 326.

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Rymer, Dennis, and Gildon. Beyond the satirical portraits in the *Battle of the Books*, nevertheless, where no one, Ancient or Modern, is spared, he did not join those who attacked Aristotle. In criticizing a book entitled, *The Rights of the Christian Church*, he even appears the defender of the ancient critic:

But it hath been a fashion of late years to explode Aristotle, and therefore this man hath fallen into it like others, for that reason, without understanding him. Aristotle's *Poetry*, *Rhetoric*, and *Politics* are admirable, and therefore, it is likely, so are his *Logics*.[1]

The only successful 'exploders' of Aristotle's *Poetics* at the beginning of the century were the popular playwrights, (of whom Farquhar is the best example), though even they found the 'rules' most embarrassing. Nicholas Rowe (1676–1718), for example, one of the playwrights who tried, with indifferent success, to break away from the neo-classical stage and return to the Elizabethan practice, feels that he must apologize for Shakespeare's neglect of Aristotle:

If one undertook to examine the greatest part of these [the tragedies] by those rules which are established by Aristotle, and taken from the model of the Grecian stage, it would be no very hard task to find a great many faults. But as Shakespear lived under a kind of mere light of nature, and had never been made acquainted with the regularity of those written precepts, so it would be hard to judge him by a law he knew nothing of.[2]

The sway of the 'rules' is too strong for Rowe. He eagerly calls attention to the perfect dramatic structure of the *Tempest*, to the

[1] Swift, in *Prose Works*, ed. by Temple Scott, 3.114. Cf. his *Sketch of the Character of Aristotle* (*Prose Works* 11.185): 'He writ upon logic, or the art of reasoning, upon moral and natural philosophy, upon oratory, poetry, etc., and seems to be a person of the most comprehensive genius that ever lived.'

The members of the Scriblerus Club, with the exception of Pope, show little interest in Aristotelian criticism. Thomas Parnell mentions Aristotle as a critic in his *Life of Zoilus*, and there is a couplet in his *Essay on the Different Stiles of Poetry* (London, 1713, p. 21) which may echo the orthodox tragic function:

By frightful accents fear produces fears.
By sad expression sorrow melts to tears.

[2] Rowe, *Some Account of the Life, etc., of Mr. William Shakespear* (1709), in *Eighteenth-Century Essays on Shakespeare*, ed. by D. Nicol Smith, p. 15.

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strict observance there of the Unities. Further, his own plays bear more than a touch of neo-classicism; and at times he obviously works with Aristotle's doctrines in mind. In the Dedication of his *Ambitious Stepmother* (1700) he writes:

But since terror and pity are laid down for the ends of tragedy by the great master and father of criticism, I was always inclined to fancy that the last and remaining impressions, which ought to be left on the minds of an audience, should proceed from one of these two.[1]

Lewis Theobald (1688–1744), one of the early editors of Shakespeare, ridiculed Dennis' infatuation with Aristotle and Dacier;[2] but, upon publishing his translations of Sophocles, he carefully included in his annotations some learned references to Dacier's version of the *Poetics*.[3]

William Warburton (1698–1779), another, even abler, editor of Shakespeare, was more consistent in his support of modern genius. He had no patience with the imitators of ancient critics. In the Preface to his edition of Shakespeare (1747) he writes:

For tho' it be very true, as Mr. Pope hath observed, that Shakespear is the fairest and fullest subject for criticism, yet it is not such a sort of criticism as may be raised mechanically on the rules which Dacier, Rapin, and Bossu have collected from antiquity; and of which such kind of writers as Rymer, Gildon, Dennis, and Oldmixon have only gathered and chewed the husks.[4]

[1] Cf. Rowe's Dedication of the *Fair Penitent* (1703).

Rowe must have represented the modern point of view to his contemporaries, at least to the staunchest Aristotelians; for Charles Gildon attacks him in the *New Rehearsal* (1714) as one who follows nature and hates all rules. As Gildon portrays him, Rowe ('Bays') has much the same spirit as that manifested by Farquhar:

Bays. Every one to his taste; you may talk of art as long as you will, but I am sure I have a better art of getting applause than can be learned from all the rules of Aristotle, Horace, or any other of the Demagogues of Parnassus. See Gildon, *The New Rehearsal: or Bays the Younger*, London, 1714, p. 84.

[2] See above, p. 82.

[3] See Theobald, *Electra*, London, 1714; *Oedipus, King of Thebes*, London, 1715.

[4] Warburton, in D. Nichol Smith, p. 105. Cf. his remarks in Pope's *Works*, ed. by Elwin and Courthope, London, 1871–86, 2.89. And compare his *Examination of the Sixth Aeneid of Virgil*, in *Miscellanea Virgiliana*, Cambridge, 1825, p. 231.

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Another independent scholar was Henry Pemberton (1694–1771), whose *Observations on Poetry* appeared in 1738. This little book is marked by an unusually accurate knowledge of classical criticism and at the same time by a remarkable independence of judgment; it is free from the common prejudices of the classical scholar. Pemberton does not rely upon Dacier and Le Bossu for his acquaintance with the *Poetics*; he goes to the Greek text. He rebels against the oppression of all ancient authority, Aristotle (and his commentators) included. More often than not, perhaps, he agrees with the *Poetics*, but he takes exception to three of its cardinal principles. In the first place, he does not believe that the essence of all art and all poetry lies in imitation; strictly speaking, only the drama is purely imitative.[1] Secondly, he objects to Aristotle's emphasis on Plot or Fable; Pemberton believes that one derives a more lasting pleasure from the characterization than from a well-constructed Fable.[2] Thirdly, he disagrees with Aristotle's preference of tragedy to the epic poem; the epic has always been a greater form of poetry.[3] On the other hand, Pemberton is content to examine Richard Glover's *Leonidas* by the conventional formula of Plot, Character, Sentiment, and Language. His book is of additional interest to the student of criticism for its remarks on language; it shows what extensive use an English critic of the eighteenth century can make of the brief chapters on Diction in the *Poetics*.

Sir Richard Blackmore (*c.* 1650–1729), although neither playwright nor Shakespearian, belonged to the group that rebelled against the Aristotelian formalists. In his *Essays* of 1716 he willingly admits that the revival of polite literature owes a large debt to the study of the *Poetics* in the Renaissance, and then to Rapin, Le Bossu, Dryden, Rymer, and himself. Blackmore respects the great genius of Aristotle, but will not yield to him as an infallible law-giver of poetry:

[1] Pemberton, *Observations on Poetry*, London, 1738, pp. 71 ff.
[2] *Ibid.* pp. 5–10.
[3] *Ibid.*, pp. 136 ff.

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I look upon Aristotle as a great genius, and a person of more than common erudition; but will no more submit to him as a lawgiver of the poets than of the philosophers. I shall always pay respect and deference to his judgment and opinions, though not acquiesce in them as infallible and decisive decrees. And if men, from a generous principle of liberty, would renounce the unjust, though prevailing, power of authority, and claim their natural right of entering into the reason of things and judging for themselves, it is highly probable that the Art of Poetry might be carried on to greater degrees of perfection, and be improved, as philosophy has been.[1]

So he tries to steer a middle course between Ancients and Moderns. This course turns out to be a compromise between ancient form and modern treatment, and the result is the Christian Epic.

Blackmore was the most ardent supporter of the epic poem in England. He had a lion's share in forming the taste for epic poetry at the beginning of the century. His numerous epic poems (which were read at the time) and his critical observations on poetry in general, epic in particular, bear testimony not only to the author's learning and taste, but to the prevailing appetite of his countrymen for heroic verse. After his declaration of independence Blackmore could not base his opinions upon Aristotle. On the other hand, he was willing enough to draw on Rapin and Le Bossu, the popular neo-classical interpreters of Aristotle's doctrines. The Preface to *Prince Arthur* (1695), the Preface to *Alfred* (1723), and the *Essay upon the Nature and Constitution of Epick Poetry* (1716), Blackmore's most significant contributions to poetic criticism, are largely restatements of theories expressed by Le Bossu and Rapin.

Blackmore has the usual discussion of poetry as an idealized imitation of Nature,[2] superior to history.[3] He has a conception better than the average of classical Unity of Action, but his

[1] Blackmore, *Essays*, London, 1716, 1.12. Cf. his Preface to *Alfred*, London, 1723, pp. xliii-xliv.
[2] See Blackmore, *Essays* 1.19 ff.
[3] *Ibid.* 1.23 ff.

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remarks are mostly confined to the epic poem.[1] His understanding of the drama is sadly distorted by his didactic principles:

> Tragedy was at its first institution a part of the ancient pagans' divine service, when the Chorus, which originally was so great a part, contained many excellent lessons of piety and morality, and was wholly employed in rectifying their mistakes about the gods and their government of the world, in moderating their passions, and purging their minds from vice and corruption. . . . The end of comedy was the same, but pursued in another way—the business of comedy being to render vice ridiculous, to expose it to public derision and contempt, and to make men ashamed of vile and sordid actions.[2]

Blackmore clearly distinguishes between the respective ends of tragedy and epic poetry. The influence of Saint-Évremond apparently was short-lived; for by this time 'admiration' has come to be associated with heroic poetry, 'pity' and 'fear' with tragedy. 'Admiration' now corresponds to what Aristotle called the 'marvelous' (*τὸ θαυμαστόν*), and, as Blackmore says, is the 'formal object of an epick poem.'[3]

In comparing epic poetry with tragedy, Blackmore without hesitation awarded the first rank to the epic poem. He pointed out that though Aristotle preferred tragedy, the unanimous vote of succeeding critics had been cast for the nobler form. This adulation of the epic poem was his most important gift to an age already well-nigh surfeited with heroic poetry.

One part of Blackmore's creed is worthy of special notice, and that is his attempt to Christianize the ancient epic poem. Poets of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance had done the like, Milton had written *Paradise Lost*, Dennis had pleaded for an infusion of

[1] See Blackmore, Preface to *Prince Arthur*, in Spingarn 3.237; *Essays* 1.37–8, 47–8; Preface to *Alfred*, pp. xxix-xxxi.

[2] Blackmore, Preface to *Prince Arthur*, in Spingarn 3.228.

[3] Blackmore, in Spingarn 3.239. Cf. *Essays* 1.33 ff., 86.
Cf. Le Bossu, *Treatise of the Epick Poem* 2.56.
Dacier (English translation of 1709, p. 153) says: 'But this way of refining the passions by admiration is in no wise the design of tragedy; for that passion is too soft for such a great effect: tragedy employs only terror and compassion, and leaves admiration for an epic poem, to which it is more necessary and proper, and where it has more time to act on habitudes and manners.'

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religion into modern poetry, and the new disciples of 'Longinus' were finding the 'sublime' well-adapted to Christian tastes; but Blackmore went further, for he produced both criticism and practice, turning out epic poems that are models of Christian piety, though they have lost certain qualities in their conversion. Nevertheless, Blackmore's poems were read and admired, and his modernization of the epic poem—since that is what his work really amounted to—doubtless had something to do with the development of the popular 'Epopee,' and ultimately of the modern novel.[1]

In the eyes of not a few contemporaries Blackmore was the leading exponent of neo-classicism in England. 'W. J.,' the English translator of Le Bossu, dedicates his translation to Sir Richard, especially honoring the author of *Prince Arthur* for his devotion to the 'rules':

> Witness your excellent *Prince Arthur*, wherein you have in a great measure confined yourself to the rules and precepts which Aristotle and Horace, and even our Bossu, have prescribed to the ethick poem.[2]

Not every one, however, agreed with W. J. Dennis seriously objected to *Prince Arthur*, and Gildon, a staunch ally of Dennis, berated Blackmore for his neglect of Aristotle.[3]

Charles Gildon (1665–1724), an admirer of Dryden, and a disciple of Dennis, achieved some prominence as a critic in the early part of the century, but his record is little more than a pale copy of Dennis' turbulent career. Like Dennis, Gildon started out as a devotee of Dryden, and therefore an enemy of Rymer and the Ancients. A letter of his in 1694 commends the natural genius of Cowley and Waller, and condemns the 'rules':

> The enemies of the Moderns will not deal so civilly with them. They deny them to be poets because they have not strictly observed the rules laid down by Aristotle; but by that they discover themselves either ignorant or negligent of the most chief and

[1] For Fielding and the comic romance see below, p. 114.
[2] W. J., Dedication of the *Treatise of the Epick Poem*.
[3] See Gildon, *The Laws of Poetry*, London, 1721, pp. 13, 254 ff.

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important end of poetry, that is, pleasure. Now it cannot be denied but he is the best poet who takes the surest means to obtain the end he aims at, in which, regard must be had to humor, custom, and inclination of the auditory; but an English audience will never be pleased with a dry, jejune, and formal method [that] excludes variety as the religious observation of the rules of Aristotle does.[1]

In 1702, however, he waxed indignant at Farquhar's impudent assertion that Aristotle knew not half as much poetry as he did;[2] in 1714 he attacked Nicholas Rowe for neglecting Aristotle;[3] by 1718 the change was complete. Gildon had become a champion of the Ancients, and as vehement a supporter of Aristotle as Dennis, though he obviously did not command the learning of Dennis.

In both the *Complete Art of Poetry* (1718) and the *Laws of Poetry* (1721) Gildon is an Ancient, a stickler for regularity. Good taste in literature—and there is very little of it about—is altogether owing to the precepts of Aristotle and Horace, to the example of the Greek and Latin poets, and to those few moderns who have been wise enough to follow the ancient models: 'Whoever shall boast that he has obtained this art by rejecting the ways of the ancients, and pursuing a quite different track, deceives others, and is himself deceived; because that is absolutely impossible.'[4] There is scarcely an original observation in all of Gildon's later work. He is content either to repeat what Dennis has already said, or to follow the French critics. There is no question that he was steeped in the *Poetics*, though he probably never went beyond Dacier's version of it.[5] Gildon's contribution to the waning cause of the Ancients must be reckoned with, for he stands with Dennis as a champion of classical regularity, and a bitter opponent of 'Gothic' variety.

[1] Gildon, in a letter to Mr. Harrington, in Durham, pp. 16–17.
[2] See Gildon, *A Comparison between the Two Stages*, pp. 174–7.
[3] Gildon, *A New Rehearsal, or Bays the Younger*. See above, p. 97.
[4] Gildon, *Complete Art of Poetry*, in Durham, p. 68.
[5] Gildon's definition of tragedy reproduces word for word the definition in the English translation (1709) of Dacier's preface, See Gildon, in Durham, p.68. Cf. *The Laws of Poetry*, pp. 149–50.

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Not all opponents of 'Gothic' variety, however, were like Gildon, who, after all, reiterated time-worn pleas for the more mechanical rules of poetry. Some of the ablest writers and philosophers at the beginning of the century deserted the old hard-and-fast standards for what Spingarn calls the 'school of taste.' These heralds of taste and sentiment no longer sought to criticize contemporary writings with the express purpose of exposing their failure to meet the rigorous demands of Aristotle and Le Bossu; they were more concerned with the individual beauties to be found, and with the appeals to good taste. For the most part, the new school opposed the most extravagant outbursts of the 'Gothic' imagination; they still insisted upon the dignity and beauty of the ancient models, but they seldom forced classical criticism upon modern literature to the total disparagement of the literature. Aristotle acquired a more benevolent if a weaker authority.

Anthony Ashley Cooper (1671–1713), Earl of Shaftesbury, is one of the best representatives of the school of taste. His famous *Characteristics* (1711) displays a thorough acquaintance with Aristotle's critical treatises, and with the Aristotelian tradition; but Shaftesbury usually contents himself with graceful compliments to the author of the *Poetics*, the 'Prince of Critics,' and the 'great master of art and consummate philologist.'[1] Yet Shaftesbury is an avowed advocate of unity in design and of regularity, and a consistent enemy to 'Gothic' irregularity. He defends the cause of the critics against the ever-present 'Critick-Haters':

> I assert, on the contrary, that they are the props and pillars of this building [The Commonwealth of Wit and Letters]; and that without their encouragement and propagation we shall remain still as Gothic architects as ever.[2]

Leonard Welsted (1688–1747) also belonged to the school of taste. His *Dissertation concerning the Perfection of the English Lan-*

[1] See Shaftesbury, *Characteristics*, London, 1711, 1.243, 246, 346; 3.139. For evidence of Shaftesbury's knowledge of the *Poetics* see *Characteristics* 1.196, 242–6, 250, 253, 254; *Second Characters*, ed. by Benjamin Rand, Cambridge, 1914, pp. 96, 97, 99, 160.
[2] Shaftesbury, *Characteristics* 1.236.

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guage, the State of Poetry, etc. (1724) belittles the rules, and exalts the beauties of good writing. Not to risk displeasing devotees of Aristotle, Scaliger, Vossius, and Le Bossu, however, he is ready to admit that 'true criticism is the truest friend of poetry.'[1] In 1712 Welsted had prepared an English translation of 'Longinus' *On the Sublime*, 'translated from Boileau's translation.'[2] It is only natural, therefore, that after the manner of 'Longinus' he should prefer selecting beautiful passages to making the formal examination characteristic of Aristotle. The growing familiarity with the treatise *On the Sublime* doubtless had much to do with establishing the school of taste in literary criticism. 'Longinus' was eminently respectable; for was not he, as well as Aristotle, an Ancient?

There were some men who attempted a compromise, or a reconciliation, between reason and sentiment, between formal criticism and the freer standards of taste. Edmund Neal (1672–1710), better known as Edmund Smith, was such a man. Smith was one of the University scholar-poets who enjoyed some success in the great world of London. His *Phaedra and Hippolytus* was produced with a distinguished cast. Addison[3] thought it an admirable tragedy; but the public thought otherwise, for it 'pleased the critics, and the critics only.'[4] Smith translated 'Longinus,' and planned an Art of Poetry of his own.[5] According to a character of him by Oldisworth, 'corrected and enlarged by Dr. Adams of Christ Church,' he was a remarkable student of the classics and the modern tongues. He tempered his poetic efforts with an extensive knowledge of the best criticism:

> There was not a tract of credit upon that subject which he had not diligently examined from Aristotle down to Hédelin and Bossu; so that having each rule constantly before him, he could carry the art through every poem, and at once point out the graces and deformities.[6]

[1] Welsted, in Durham, p. 376.
[2] See Spingarn 3.300.
[3] See Addison, in *Spectator*, No. 18.
[4] Samuel Johnson, *Lives of the English Poets* 2.15.
[5] See *The Works of Mr. Edmund Smith* (4th ed.), London, 1729, p. xviii.
[6] *Ibid.*, pp. x-xi; Johnson, *Lives of the English Poets* 2.5.

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Dr. Johnson was not so flattering as Oldisworth and Dr. Adams; but Smith did possess remarkable literary talents, and his early death cut short a promising career.

The most influential of all the moderators of criticism during the early half of the century was Joseph Addison, who came nearer than any one else to winning the respect and esteem of all parties, though even he, mild dictator that he was, could not escape the impartial bludgeoning of Dennis. Addison belonged in part to the school of taste; he was a veritable English 'Longinus'; yet he employed, in his criticisms of Milton, the formal method. His papers in the *Spectator* have made the Aristotelian Fable, Manners, Sentiments, and Diction familiar to students of criticism on both sides of the Atlantic. In the second paper on *Paradise Lost* Addison declares his hope that the examination will not only serve as a comment upon Milton but upon Aristotle as well.[1]

There is nothing startlingly new in Addison's interpretation of the *Poetics*; for the most part his ideas conform to the conventional rules of the French commentators, and he often follows Dryden or Rymer; but scattered here and there in the papers on *Paradise Lost*, and in other numbers of the *Spectator* as well, are a few observations that throw much light on the polite Englishman's conception of Aristotle's theories of poetry.

Addison thinks of all poetry as an idealized imitation of nature. In epic poetry the ideal seems to mean the marvelous as well, for Addison actually makes the marvelous the most distinguishing feature of the heroic poem:

> Aristotle observes that the fable in an epic poem should abound in circumstances that are both credible and astonishing; or, as the French critics choose to phrase it, the fable should be filled with the probable and the marvelous. This rule is as fine and just as any in Aristotle's whole Art of Poetry.
>
> If the fable is only probable, it differs nothing from a true history; if it is only marvelous, it is no better than a romance.

[1] See Addison, *Spectator*, No. 273.

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The great secret, therefore, of heroic poetry is to relate such circumstances as may produce in the reader at the same time both belief and astonishment.[1]

At the very outset of his remarks on *Paradise Lost* Addison makes clear that Unity of Action is the most important requisite of a good epic poem, and his ideal of organic unity (an ideal based on the *Poetics*) is distinctly classical.[2] He still shares the orthodox objection to tragi-comedy, and to the double plot in drama.[3] His own *Cato* is good evidence of his admiration for classical structure in tragedy.

While Addison's view of the epic poem verges on the neo-classical, his notion of tragedy comes much closer to the *Poetics*. He believes that the aim of tragedy (as of all serious poetry) is to arouse pity and terror. He shares the common notion that our delight in tragic representations largely arises from their fictitious nature; secure in our own safety, we indulge in a revel of vicarious fear and grief.[4] Addison thoroughly approves Aristotle's commendation of the unhappy ending, and hence as thoroughly disapproves the modern fashion of poetical justice.[5]

'As a perfect tragedy is the noblest production of human nature, so it is capable of giving the mind one of the most delightful and most improving entertainments.'[6] At first glance it looks as if Addison has turned against the eighteenth-century idolatry of epic poetry; but his criticism of *Paradise Lost* shows that for him also the epic poem was a nobler creation than tragedy. 'Admiration,' for example, the characteristic eighteenth-century epic emotion, is the 'most pleasing passion that can rise in the mind of man.'[7] Possibly, however, Addison's adherence to Aristotle may have aroused doubts in his own mind as to the supreme position of the heroic poem.

[1] Addison, in *Spectator*, No. 315.
[2] *Ibid.*, Nos. 267, 273.
[3] *Ibid.*, No. 40.
[4] *Ibid.*, No. 418.
[5] *Ibid.*, No. 40; cf. Nos. 39, 42.
[6] *Ibid.*, No. 39.
[7] *Ibid.*, No. 315.

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Nowhere is Addison truer to the doctrines of the *Poetics* than in his treatment of plot, or action. The action comes first in importance. 'This is Aristotle's method of considering, first the fable, and secondly the manners; or, as we generally call them in English, the fable and the characters.'[1] Addison divides plots into two classes, *simple* and *implex*.[2] The *implex*, or involved plot, which contains changes of fortune, is superior. Addison admits that modern tragedies excel the ancient in the intricate arrangement of the action; but he maintains his classical standards by pointing out the woeful failure of modern writers to preserve the necessary moral.[3]

Addison would like to apply the test of the ideal tragic personage of the *Poetics*[4] to the chief personages in *Paradise Lost*; but he realizes that such treatment would hardly square with the nature of Adam, Raphael, or Satan. Thus he is forced to conclude that Aristotle's rules for epic poetry, while they hold for Homer, will not perfectly fit the modern poem: 'It is evident to every impartial judge that his [Aristotle's] rules would still have been more perfect could he have perused the *Aeneid*, which was made some hundred years after his death.'[5] Addison's own Cato is further evidence that he did not hold with Aristotle in rejecting the man of consummate virtue as a good tragic character.

Addison preserved a commendable independence of judgment in his attitude towards all authorities, ancient and modern, but

[1] Addison, in *Spectator*, No. 273.
[2] *Ibid.*, No. 297.
[3] *Ibid.*, No. 39.
[4] Addison, in *Spectator*, No. 273, quotes 'an admirable observation out of Aristotle which has been very much misrepresented in the quotations of some modern critics:
' "If a man of perfect and consummate virtue falls into a misfortune, it raises our pity, but not our terror, because we do not fear that it may be our own case, who do not resemble the suffering person. But (as that great philosopher adds) if we see a man of virtue, mixt with infirmities, fall into any misfortune, it does not only raise our pity, but our terror; because we are afraid that the like misfortune may happen to ourselves, who resemble the character of the suffering person." '
[5] *Ibid.*, No. 273.

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he was not prepared to go as far as the more outspoken champions of modern liberty, the editors and critics of Shakespeare. In dealing with the epic poem he naturally was little concerned with the unities other than the all-important Unity of Action. In the drama, however, since he scrupulously observed the unities of Time and Place in *Cato*, he evidently favored the more formal method of the French dramatists.

Several minor doctrines of the *Poetics* come up in the *Spectator*, for where Addison is dealing with theories of poetry or the serious theatre he never gets far from Aristotle. He has a very definite opinion on the use of Spectacle in tragedy:

> Aristotle has observed that ordinary writers in tragedy endeavor to raise terror and pity in their audience, not by proper sentiments and expressions, but by the dresses and decorations of the stage. There is something of this kind very ridiculous in the English theatre.[1]

Thus Addison makes no compromise between spectacular devices designed to arouse pity and fear and the legitimate means of a good plot. This attack in the *Spectator* is one of the earliest protests against the growing use of scenic machinery on the stage to make up for weak plays. As far back as 1693 Rymer[2] had deplored the public taste for gaudy show, and Dennis[3] and others, on similar grounds, had attacked the Italian opera. Later, the followers of Aristotle repeatedly deprecated the emphasis on Spectacle.

Of the remarks on Diction in the *Poetics* Addison makes more use than any other popular critic. He devotes an entire number of the *Spectator* (No. 285) to an examination of the language of *Paradise Lost*, and here a large part of his criticism is based on the views of Aristotle. Long before writing on Milton, he

[1] Addison, in *Spectator*, No. 42; cf. No. 44.
[2] See above, p. 62.
[3] See above, p. 86. Cf. Addison, in *Spectator*, No. 18.

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mentions with approval Aristotle's advice that the place for elaborate diction is at a point where there is no marked action or characterization.[1]

The influence of the *Poetics* is present in almost every critical passage Addison wrote; it nearly always comes to light when he is dealing with the basic elements of poetry. If we carefully examine the eighteen papers on *Paradise Lost*, we see that the early ones definitely rest on Aristotle.[2] Thereafter, having laid a foundation for his criticism, Addison felt free to take up the 'beauties' of the individual books, where, emulating the method of the great 'Longinus,'[3] he could indulge his own taste.

Addison was the best representative of the polite critic, the gentleman of letters, who commands learning enough to make an occasional venture into literary criticism; he was at once the most popular and the most admired type of critic in the early eighteenth century. More than one contemporary critic really knew more about the history and theories of poetry. Joseph Trapp (1679–1747), for example, the first professor of poetry at Oxford, made the critical study and teaching of polite literature his life work. His lectures at the University were published under the title of *Praelectiones Poeticae*—the first volume in 1711, the second in 1715, and the third in 1719.[4] Trapp approached his

[1] Addison, in *Spectator*, No. 39: 'There is a fine observation in Aristotle to this purpose, which I have never seen quoted. "The expression (says he) ought to be very much labored in the unactive parts of the fable, as in descriptions, similitudes, narrations, and the like: in which the opinions, manners, and passions of men are not represented; for these (namely, the opinions, manners, and passions) are apt to be obscured by pompous phrases and elaborate expressions." ' Cf. *Poetics* 24.1460^{b}2–4.

[2] See *Spectator*, Nos. 267, 273, 279, 285, 297.

[3] There is a noticeable difference between Addison and the seventeenth-century disciples of Aristotle. In Addison the appreciation of external nature is strongly expressed; he finds a keen delight in the wildness of the fields and the forests, and in naturalistic gardens. 'Nature' is fast coming to hold a grander place in life than has art. See Addison's papers on the pleasures of the imagination, in *Spectator*, Nos. 411 ff.

[4] An English translation, by William Clarke and William Bowyer, was published at London in 1742. Clarke writes to Bowyer that he finds Trapp very exasperating at times, and that he is particularly perplexed over Aristotle's definition of tragedy. See John Nichols, *Literary Anecdotes* 2.148–50.

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subject systematically, in the academic manner. He aimed to compile, after the manner of Scaliger and Vossius, an Art of Poetry of his own.

There is little that is new or original in Trapp's lectures, but they are eminently sound and conservative. Among his numerous authorities, Aristotle comes first, and after him Horace, 'Longinus,' Scaliger, Vossius, Dacier, Rapin, and Le Bossu. Trapp's definitions are largely drawn from the *Poetics*, though he falls into the fashionable veneration for the epic poem as the highest form of poetry.[1] His elaborate discussion of tragedy is notable for a distinct pathological interpretation of *catharsis*, side by side with the conventional insistence on the moral effect of a tragic play.[2] Trapp acknowledges that he found his interpretation in Milton's Preface to *Samson Agonistes*.

For the most part, Trapp firmly supported the 'rules.' He had no respect for tragi-comedy, and very little for the Italian opera. He granted domestic tragedy a place in modern drama, but, for the sublime, held only the classical type, dealing with the actions of kings and heroes, to be fitting. On the other hand, Trapp was no slave to antiquity; he exhorted modern writers to imitate Milton more, and Homer or Virgil less. For all his neo-classical moralizing and didacticism, Trapp possessed a share of the growing spirit of compromise that was rapidly displacing the intolerance of Rymer and Dennis.

John Upton[3] (1707–1760), whose *Critical Observations on Shakespeare* appeared in 1746, was another conservative disciple of the 'rules.' He had followed the advice of Horace and gone to Grecian models, but, at the same time, he was an honest admirer

[1] See Trapp, *Praelectiones Poeticae* 3.2–3, 103 ff.; in the English translation (*Lectures on Poetry*), p. 238. Cf. Trapp's Preface to his translation of the *Aeneid* (London, 1731).

[2] For a detailed account of Trapp's interpretation of Aristotle's *catharsis*, see my article, *Joseph Trapp and the Aristotelian 'Catharsis,'* in *Mod. Lang. Notes* 41 (1926). 158–63. In addition to the Latin lectures Trapp has a good discussion of tragedy in his *Works of Virgil translated into English Blank Verse* (3 vols.), London, 1731, 2.191–3.

[3] John was the son of James Upton, who edited the Greek text, with a Latin translation, of the *Poetics* at Cambridge in 1696. See above, p. 81.

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of English poetry, and especially of the poems of Milton and Shakespeare. He considered the best of Shakespeare's tragedies (*Othello*, *Hamlet*, and *Macbeth*) well-formed plays.

In the *Observations*, Upton admits that Shakespeare disregards the unities of Time and Place, but believes that he obeys the Unity of Action. He finds, moreover, that the Manners and Sentiments in the best dramas of Shakespeare are excellent. Shakespeare observes decorum, and is a friend to virtue. His tragedies, since they combine the qualities of drama and heroic poem,[1] cannot strictly conform to the ancient models. Further, unlike the Greek dramatists, Shakespeare is both a tragic and a comic poet: 'He is the best instance that can be cited to countenance that famous passage in Plato's *Banquet*, where the philosopher makes a tragic and a comic poet both allow, against their inclinations, that he who, according to the best rules of art, was a writer of tragedy, must be likewise a good writer of comedy.'[2]

Upton was an orthodox critic, steeped in the doctrines of the *Poetics*, yet one who could find much to admire in the 'irregular' Shakespeare. He did not find it necessary to turn 'Gothic' in order to be true to the great English poets; he believed that the good critic, if he is to throw light on the creations of modern genius, should be perfectly familiar with ancient standards. Upton's method forecasts the way in which Dr. Johnson and Coleridge were to treat Shakespeare.

[1] Probably Upton here has Dryden in mind. See above, pp. 69–70.
[2] Upton, *Critical Observations on Shakespeare*, London, 1746, p. 108.

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CHAPTER IV

THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY, CONTINUED

By the middle of the eighteenth century the neo-classical spirit showed signs of waning. Thomas Gray, though well-versed in many of the ancient writers, including Aristophanes and Plato, represents a growing interest in mediæval study. He encountered Aristotle's writings, of course, but, denying himself the aid of superficial popular commentaries, found Aristotle too difficult. In one of his letters he writes:

> For my part I read Aristotle; his *Poetics*, *Politics*, and *Morals*, though I don't well know which is which. In the first place he is the hardest author by far I ever meddled with; then he has a dry conciseness that makes one imagine one is perusing a Table of Contents rather than a book.[1]

Scholars and literary men had come to distrust the French commentaries, and were more and more turning to the original texts of the ancients. Dr. Johnson, in his life of William Collins, tells how, about 1744, he met the poor young literary adventurer in London when Collins had just undertaken to prepare a translation of the *Poetics* with extensive commentary. On the strength of Collins' promise the booksellers had advanced him a sum of money. Soon after, an uncle left the young writer 2,000 pounds, and 'the guineas were then repaid, and the translation neglected.'[2] Collins' attempt to translate the *Poetics* probably indicates that Englishmen realized the need of new translations and commentaries for Aristotle, and there are other signs as well of the growing distrust of the didactic French misinterpreters of the *Poetics*.

[1] *Letters of Thomas Gray*, ed. by Duncan C. Tovey, London, 1900, 1.138–9; cf. 1.336.

[2] Johnson, *Lives of the English Poets* 3.337.

For evidence that Collins was familiar with the *Poetics* see his two poems, *Ode to Fear*, *Ode to Pity*.

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Most of the English critics still believed in the pre-eminence of the heroic poem, but the heroic tragedy, with its pseudo-Aristotelian trappings, had already begun to pall on intelligent Englishmen. Henry Fielding delivered a timely blow to neo-classical 'heroics' with his *Tragedy of Tragedies, or the Life and Death of Tom Thumb the Great*, first played at the Haymarket Theatre in 1730. The whole work—preface, play, and elaborate notes—is the keenest of satire, not so much upon particular playwrights of the heroic school as against the school itself, and the unbending standards of neo-classical drama.[1]

The Preface to this *Tragedy of Tragedies*, by 'H. Scriblerus Secundus,' is a masterly protest at Aristotle's authority. The method of dramatic criticism is that of Dennis, Addison, and other sound critics.[2] 'Scriblerus' says: 'Let us now proceed to a regular examination of the tragedy before us, in which I shall treat separately of the Fable, the Moral, the Characters, the Sentiments, and the Diction. And first of the Fable.' Beneath the satire one readily perceives Fielding's unusually keen insight into the difference between Aristotle and the neo-classical commentators. An example will display Fielding's acumen. 'H. Scriblerus Secundus' does not believe that the greatness of the hero's soul is in direct proportion to his body, or, let us add, his station: 'If I understand Aristotle right, he speaketh only of the greatness of the action, and not of the person.'[3]

Fielding never tired of assailing the hidebound critics of the drama, with their ancient and eternal 'regularity'[4]; and in his

[1] Many authors, from Dennis and Dryden to Fielding's own contemporaries are mentioned in Preface and notes.

[2] Cf. James Thomson (1700–1748), Preface to *Sophonisba* (London, 1730): 'It [the story] is one, regular, and uniform, not charged with a multiplicity of incidents, and yet affording several revolutions of fortune; by which the passions may be excited, varied, and driven to their full tumult of emotion. This unity of design was always sought after, and admired, by the ancients; and the most eminent among the moderns, who understood their writings, have chosen to imitate them in this, from an entire conviction that the reason of it must hold good in all ages.'

[3] Preface to the *Tragedy of Tragedies*.

[4] For good 'Aristotelian' horse-play, see Fielding's Prolegomena to the *Covent-Garden Tragedy* (1732), and *Tumble-Down Dick, or Phaeton in the Suds*, acted in 1744 as a 'dramatic entertainment.'

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novels, which he soon came to take more seriously than his plays, the same attitude is present. But Fielding himself was profoundly influenced by his classical studies. When he wrote *Joseph Andrews* (1742), he obviously intended it as a parody of Richardson's *Pamela*, and the story never wholly departs from this purpose; nevertheless, along with the satire, a more serious purpose comes to light in Fielding's conscious effort to create a new form of literature based upon ancient and established principle. In the Preface to *Joseph Andrews* the author presents what he considers to be the guiding principles of Comic Epic, meaning the comic romance, or, as the critics would have it, the 'Comic Epopee.'[1] The comic epic poem differs from the serious in Action, Characters, Sentiments, and Diction: the Action is light and ridiculous, the Characters are of inferior rank and manners, and the Diction and Sentiments preserve the ludicrous style instead of the sublime.

For authority, Fielding first turns to the *Poetics*, where he finds a good hint for his particular method, though not a satisfactory explanation of it:

> It may seem remarkable that Aristotle, who is so fond and free of definitions, hath not thought proper to define the Ridiculous. Indeed, where he tells us it is proper to comedy, he hath remarked that villainy is not its object; but he hath not, as I remember, positively asserted what it is.[2]

Taking his cue from Ben Jonson,[3] Fielding asserts that ridicule is the proper function of comedy. He finds the only source of the

[1] See James Beattie, *Essays on Poetry and Music*, Edinburgh, 1778, pp. 110–11, note; James Harris, *Philological Inquiries*, London, 1781, p. 163, note.

Even by the middle of the century the epic taste was still in vogue. See John Brown, *Essays on the Characteristics*, London, 1751, pp. 20–1.

[2] Fielding, Preface to *Joseph Andrews*.

There is a definite basis for Fielding's theory of the comic epic poem in *Poetics* 2.1448a12. Aristotle apparently recognizes Cleophon as a writer of prosaic epic, the epic of the commonplace, wherein the author represents men like ourselves, neither better nor worse. See Bywater's note on the passage.

[3] In the Preface to *Joseph Andrews* Fielding acknowledges his debt to Jonson. Cf. Fielding, in the *Covent-Garden Journal*, No. 55.

Fielding also has a very definite notion of a *comic catharsis*. See the Preface to *Joseph Andrews*.

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ridiculous in affectation, the affectation that arises from either hypocrisy or vanity. Fielding wholly agrees with Aristotle that the painful has no place in true comedy:

Now, from affectation only, the misfortunes and calamities of life, or the imperfections of nature, may become the objects of ridicule. Surely he hath a very ill-framed mind who can look on ugliness, infirmity, or poverty as ridiculous in themselves; nor do I believe any man living, who meets a dirty fellow riding through the streets in a cart, is struck with an idea of the Ridiculous from it; but if he should see the same figure descend from his coach and six, or bolt from his chair with his hat under his arm, he would then begin to laugh, and with justice. . . . Much less are natural imperfections the object of derision; but when ugliness aims at the applause of beauty, or lameness endeavors to display agility, it is then that these unfortunate circumstances, which at first moved our compassion, tend only to raise our mirth.[1]

Although Fielding was a sincere enemy of neo-classical standards in literature, and although his contributions to the development of the modern novel have doubtless been associated with the triumph of 'Gothic' taste, clearly he based his whole theory of literary composition on the *Poetics*. His critical prefaces in *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones* uphold the belief that all creative writing, whether epic or dramatic, is representative imitation of Nature. The writer should always confine himself strictly to Nature, 'from the just imitation of which will flow all the pleasure we can this way convey to a sensible reader.'[2] The introductory chapter to Book 8 of *Tom Jones* subscribes to Aristotle's distinction between historical and poetic truth, and even holds to the principle that a likely impossibility is better than an unconvincing possibility. Fielding, however, demands more realism than does Aristotle, who believes that the marvelous is germane to the epic poem, and that it has some place in tragedy as well; but Fielding asks the good writer to keep within the bounds of both possibility and probability: 'The only super-

[1] Fielding, Preface to *Joseph Andrews*.
[2] *Ibid.*; cf. *Tom Jones*, Book 7, ch. 1.

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natural agents which can in any manner be allowed to us moderns are ghosts, but of these I would advise an author to be extremely sparing.'[1]

The artistic method of Fielding in his novels confirms his theories. *Joseph Andrews* is an excellent model of involved plot, since there are Discoveries throughout it, and it is a story of character.[2] Discovery after Discovery appears in the story until the reader comes to the *dénouement*, when the parentage of both Joseph and Fanny is disclosed. The peddler supplies a good example of Aristotle's fifth form of Discovery (that by false inference), a kind that may be specially useful in comedy.[3] The peddler relates how the gypsies stole Fanny away from the Andrews; thereupon every one assumes that Joseph, since he has always passed for an Andrews, is Fanny's own brother. This wretched turn of events for the lovers is finally relieved, upon the arrival of Gaffar and Gammar Andrews, by a second Discovery. Meanwhile, 'they [Joseph and Fanny] felt perhaps little less anxiety in this interval than Oedipus himself, whilst his fate was revealing.'[4] Gammar Andrews furnishes the solution: she relates how the gypsies substituted Joseph for her own little girl, Fanny, a fact she had hitherto kept secret. Then, by the birthmark on his shoulder, Joseph is identified as the long-lost son of Mr. Wilson; and so the tale is brought to a conclusion. Such a riot of Discoveries might not meet the approval of the sober-minded Aristotle; but the evidence is strong that Fielding wrote with an eye to Aristotle's advice.

With *Tom Jones* (1749) the 'Comic Epopee' emerges in its perfection. Coleridge's praise may be too enthusiastic when he exclaims, 'What a master of composition Fielding was! Upon my word I think the *Oedipus Tyrranus*, the *Alchemist*, and *Tom Jones*,

[1] Fielding, *Tom Jones*, Book 8, ch. 1.

[2] Cf. *Poetics* 24.1459 ^{b}14–15.

[3] See Lane Cooper, *The Fifth Form of Discovery in the Poetics*, in *An Aristotelian Theory of Comedy*, pp. 290–305.

[4] Fielding, *Joseph Andrews*, Book 4, ch. 15. The quotation surely shows that Fielding had classical models in mind.

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the three most perfect plots ever planned.'[1] Still *Tom Jones* is an excellent example of close-knit structure, one of the most involved of plots, containing Discovery throughout. It is withal one of the best stories of character ever written.

Like the art of every great story-teller since Homer, Fielding's art is natural; but he also is the conscious artist who proceeds according to definite principles. Sir Walter Scott pays a just tribute to the founder of the 'Comic Epopee' when he says:

Fielding had high notions of the dignity of an art which he may be considered as having founded. He challenges a comparison between the novel and the epic. Smollett, Le Sage, and others, emancipating themselves from the strictness of the rules he has laid down, have written rather a history of the miscellaneous adventures which befall an individual in the course of life than the plot of a regular and connected epopoeia, where every step brings us a point nearer to the final catastrophe. These great masters have been satisfied if they amused the reader upon the road; though the conclusion only arrived because the tale must have an end, just as the traveler alights at the inn because it is evening.[2]

Fielding's contemporaries[3] were not blind to the debt *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones* owe to the theories of Aristotle. Smollett resented Fielding's attempt to lay down rules for writing the 'Epopee.' In a savage attack on his great rival, entitled the *Faithful Narrative of Habakkuk Hilding* (1752), Smollett represents the crazed 'Habakkuk' (Fielding) as mounted on a jackass named 'Bucephalus,' and attended, naturally enough, by his right-hand man, 'Aristotle.'

Smollett himself was familiar with Aristotle and the *Poetics*. Near the end of his first novel, *Roderick Random* (1748), he introduces a realistic scene of dramatic criticism. The hero, Random,

[1] Coleridge, *Table-Talk* (July 5, 1834). Cf. Pye's praise in his commentary on the *Poetics*, pp. 182–3.

[2] Scott, Introduction to the *Fortunes of Nigel*.

[3] Samuel Richardson, who, in the academic sense, was not a learned man, has picked up a few scraps of the popular Aristotelian doctines, which he uses to some advantage in *Pamela*. See Richardson, *Works*, London, 1883, 2.198–9; 3.90–1.

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is in jail. One of his fellow-inmates is a poor tragic poet, who offers Random his latest creation for criticism. The hero's method of examination is a familiar one:

The fable, in my opinion, was well-chosen, and naturally conducted, the incidents interesting, the characters beautifully contrasted, strongly-marked, and well-supported; the diction poetical, spirited, and correct; the unities of the drama maintained with the most scrupulous exactness; the opening gradual and engaging, the *peripeteia* surprising, and the catastrophe affecting. In short, I judged it by the laws of Aristotle and Horace, and could find nothing in it exceptionable, but a little too much embellishment in some few places, which objection he removed to my satisfaction by a quotation from Aristotle's *Poetics*, importing that the least interesting parts of a poem ought to be raised and dignified by the charms and energy of diction.[1]

Smollett was not so adept in structure as Fielding; *Roderick Random* and *Peregrine Pickle* follow the loose, rambling method of stories like *Don Quixote* and *Gil Blas*, though *Humphrey Clinker*, in spite of its epistolary style, is a 'Comic Epopee.' The involved plot of *Humphrey Clinker*, with its Discoveries and startling *dénouement*, all naturally brought in, the excellent characterization, and the admirable diction, make the story a serious rival to some of Fielding's novels—if not to his masterpiece, then to *Joseph Andrews* and *Amelia*.

Involved plot and Discoveries are common property of all good story-tellers. Aristotle found them in Homer, as well as else-

[1] Smollett, *Roderick Random*, ch. 62.
The quotation the poet gave was *Poetics* 24.1460 ^{b}2–4.
In 1749 Smollett seems to have translated, or at least assisted in translating, Le Sage's *Gil Blas*. If Smollett actually did the work, we can imagine with what relish he wrote the following: 'It is one of those tragic subjects which harrow up the soul, by images of death presented to the senses, in all their fearful forms. I am of Aristotle's mind: terror is a principal engine. Oh! if I had written for the stage, I would have introduced none but bloody tyrants, and death-dispensing heroes. Not all the perfumes of Arabia should have sweetened this blood-polluted hand; I would have been up to my elbows in gore. There would have been tragedy with a vengeance; principal characters! ay, guards and attendants should all have been sprawling together. I would have butchered every man of them, and the prompter into the bargain. In a word, I refine upon Aristotle, and border on the horrible; that is my taste.'—*The Adventures of Gil Blas of Santillane*, trans. by Tobias Smollett, Book 2, ch. 9; cf. Book 5, ch. 1.

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where; and there is no reason why the English novelists of the eighteenth century should not have found them in other writers; they did not have to read the *Poetics* in order to learn how to form a good plot. Since they manifestly did read the *Poetics*, however, it is only reasonable to suppose that they made some use of the suggestions Aristotle has to give them. Their works support the supposition.[1]

About the middle of the century formal literary criticism in England became more and more involved with philosophy and aesthetics. The so-called 'school of taste' naturally turned to aesthetic doctrine, and even the more conservative critics sought relief from the worn-out formulas of Rapin, Le Bossu, and their numerous English imitators. Occasionally an orthodox follower of neo-classical standards revived the memory of a dying cause, but most of the literary men between Addison and Coleridge were keenly alive to the rapid growth of new standards of judgment. Some of these critics, throwing aside all ancient theories, tried to establish new laws; more, probably, sought an accurate understanding of the ancients in the hope of reconciling with modern literature all that is permanent in Aristotle, Horace, and 'Longinus.' Consequently there were no longer clear-cut distinctions of 'ancient' and 'modern,' or 'classical' and 'Gothic.' With a clear conscience, a critic could at last follow both Aristotle and 'Longinus'; he could admire both Sophocles and Shakespeare.

David Hume, in spite of his modern rationalistic philosophy, held to a conservative theory of poetic art. In his criticism he disapproves of 'irregularity,' believing that poetry should be confined by 'rules of art.' He strongly advocates Aristotle's Unity of Action, though his own concept of unity is prosaic

[1] There is no question about Fielding's or Smollett's knowledge of the *Poetics*. Sterne, in *Tristram Shandy*, Book 3, ch. 24, disclaims any acquaintance with Aristotle's theories: 'I care not what Aristotle, or Pacuvius, or Bossu, or Ricaboni say, though I never read one of them.' The criticism of the learned 'Slawkenbergius' in *Tristram Shandy* is based on Scaliger rather than Aristotle. See *Slawkenbergius' Tale*, in *Tristram Shandy*, Book 4.

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enough to embrace history as well as the epic poem.[1] His essay, *Of Tragedy* (1757), corroborates the growing pathological theory of tragic *catharsis*.[2] Hume emulates Aristotle's method in approaching the problem from the spectator's point of view:

> They are pleased in proportion as they are afflicted, and never are so happy as when they employ tears, sobs, and cries to give vent to their sorrow, and relieve their heart, swollen with the tenderest sympathy and compassion.[3]

Alexander Gerard (1728–1795), a philosophical adherent of the 'school of taste,' whose *Essay on Taste* (1759) won a prize offered by the Philosophical Society of Edinburgh, was fundamentally a classicist, and consequently opposed to 'Gothic' creations. His essay upholds the organic unity of Greek art:

> The profusion of ornament, bestowed on the parts in Gothic structures, may please one who has not acquired enlargement of mind sufficient for conceiving at one view their relation to the whole; but no sooner is this acquired than he perceives superior elegance in the more simple symmetry and proportion of Grecian architecture.[4]

Gerard believes that modern writers must establish exact standards of judgment. He is constrained to admire the poet's fire in 'Longinus'; but, for reliable authority, he recommends the cool Aristotle:

> Aristotle, on the contrary, appears to examine his subject perfectly cool and unaffected; he discovers no warmth of imagination, no such admiration or ecstasy as can, without reflection, transport his readers into his opinion. He derives his decisions, not from the liveliness of feeling, but from the depth of penetration; and seldom pronounces them without convincing us they are just.[5]

[1] See Hume, *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*, in *Essays*, ed. by T. H. Green and T. H. Grose, London, 1882, 2.19–23, note.

[2] Popular acquaintance with ancient theories of drama must have received an impetus with the English translation, in 1759, of Brumoy's *Greek Theatre*. There is much of Aristotle in the preliminary *Discourse upon the Original of Tragedy*. See *The Greek Theatre of Father Brumoy*, London, 1759; Mrs. Charlotte Lennox and others prepared the translation.

[3] Hume, *Essays*, 1.258–9.

[4] Gerard, *Essay on Taste*, London, 1759, pp. 122–3.

[5] *Ibid.*, pp. 97–8.

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Like Gerard, but unlike most others, Richard Hurd preferred Aristotle to 'Longinus.'[1] Hurd saw that literary criticism in the eighteenth century had been wavering between the methods of Aristotle and 'Longinus,' with 'Longinus' steadily gaining general support. Thus in the Dedication of his edition of Horace's *Epistola ad Augustum*, in 1753, Hurd remarks:

The catching enthusiasm and picturesque fancy of the one would be sure to prevail over the coolness and austerity of the other. Accordingly, in the last and present century, when now the diligence of learned men had, by restoring the purity, opened an easy way to the study of the old classics, a numberless tribe of commentators have attempted, after the manner of Longinus, to flourish on the excellencies of their composition. And some of them, indeed, succeeded so well in this method that one is not to wonder it soon became the popular and only authorized form of what was reputed *just criticism*. Yet, as nothing but superior genius could make it tolerable even in the best of these, it was to be expected (what experience hath now fully shown) that it would at length, and in ordinary hands, degenerate into the most unmeaning, frivolous, and disgustful jargon that ever discredited polite letters.[2]

Hurd himself believed in uniting the two methods, in combining a warm appreciation of natural beauties with the calm judgment of an Aristotle or a Horace.

The well-known *Letters on Chivalry and Romance* (1762)[3] admirably demonstrate Hurd's success in forming his own critical taste from both classical and romantic sources. In the *Letters* he shrewdly points out that 'Gothic' chivalry resembles the Homeric tales of Greek antiquity, but emphasizes the important truth that the poems of Spenser and Milton should be read and criticized as 'Gothic' poetry, not as classical. Grecian ideas of unity have no place in the *Faerie Queene*, which is 'Gothic' in structure, and consequently lacking in Unity of Action, though it does possess a

[1] For a fairly representative example of the popular admiration for 'Longinus,' see Edward Burnaby Greene's *Critical Essays*, London [1770?].

[2] Hurd's Horace, London (5th ed.) 1776, 2. xii–xiii.

[3] See Edith Morley's edition, London, 1911.

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very definite Unity of Design. Hurd makes much of the advantages of 'Gothic' manners and machines to produce the 'sublime.'

On the other hand, in dealing with strictly classical writings such as the *Epistles* of Horace, no one could be more classical than Hurd, no one more devoted to the doctrines of the *Poetics* and the *Ars Poetica*. Far from being dependent upon French commentaries, Hurd has no patience with the threadbare rehabilitation of Aristotle:

> The world hath been nauseated with insipid lectures on Aristotle and Phalereus; whose solid sense hath been so attenuated and subtilized by the delicate operation of French criticism, as hath even gone some way towards bringing the art itself into disrepute.[1]

Hurd's classical discussions of poetic theory are three dissertations, *On the Idea of Universal Poetry*, *On the Provinces of the Drama*, and *A Discourse of Poetical Imitation*, all contained in his edition of Horace.[2] His interpretations of Aristotle are conventional, but not didactic. He allows instruction an important place in history but not in poetry; poetry aims chiefly to please and only secondarily to teach.[3]

His theory of drama is based on the *Poetics*. He divides drama into three classes—tragedy, comedy, and farce.[4] Tragedy is the species of dramatic representation that aims to 'excite the passions of pity and terror, and perhaps some others nearly allied to them.' Comedy aims to arouse the 'sensation of pleasure arising from a view of the truth of characters, more especially their specific differences.'[5] Farce is that species of drama in which the 'sole aim and tendency is to excite laughter.' Hurd is as emphatic

[1] Hurd's Horace 1. iii–iv.

[2] The work began in 1749 with the publication of the *Epistola ad Pisones*. The fifth edition, 1776, is in three volumes.

[3] See Hurd's Horace 2.135, 140, 149, 238.

[4] *Ibid.* 2.164.

[5] Hurd takes Aristotle's *μίμησις φαυλοτέρων* to mean that characters are more important in comedy than plot. A good plot is essential to both forms, but not so necessary for comedy as tragedy. See Hurd's Horace 2.171, note.

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as Aristotle in his treatment of dramatic action: 'The purpose of the drama is universally to "represent human life in the way of action."[1]' Characters, or manners, are important, but, in tragedy at least, secondary: 'They become an inferior consideration in the views of the tragic poet, and are exhibited only for the sake of making the action more proper to interest us.'[2]

Now and then Hurd carried his reverence for Aristotle to an extreme. For example, he deplored the modern disuse in tragedy of the Chorus, which, when properly handled, can add much to the dignity and decorum of the tragic scene.[3] Usually, however, Hurd's criticisms are both scholarly and sensible, his understanding of Aristotle's doctrines consistently intelligent, his illustrations from ancient and modern drama well-chosen.

In 1762, the year in which Hurd's defense of 'Gothic' literature appeared, John Newbery published his *Art of Poetry on a New Plan*. The title is deceptive, for Newbery offers the familiar eighteenth-century formulas, drawn from the French critics, with some assistance from Scaliger and Vossius. He is clearly a devotee of the 'sentimental drama' that turns the theatre into a school for morality; though, to do him justice, he never insists upon a strict observance of all the 'rules.' Nor is he a slave to ancient authority; he apparently is sincere when he says that 'many a man has left truth and nature to follow Aristotle and Horace.'[4] Newbery read the *Poetics*; though his general observations on the drama are commonplace, his special discussion of tragedy, and, in particular, of the use of Discovery, is well done.[5]

The critics whose writings embraced a study of aesthetics larger than formal criticism naturally found 'Longinus' a more congenial authority than Aristotle, though they still deferred to the *Poetics*. In 1756 Burke brought out his first version of the

[1] Hurd's Horace 2.164.
[2] *Ibid.* 2.166.
[3] *Ibid.* 1.129–32.
[4] Newbery 2.156.
[5] See Newbery 2.167–70. He is much more tolerant, and is better-informed, than the author of *Cursory Remarks on Tragedy*, London, 1774, who refuses to excuse Shakespeare from the obligations of neo-classical 'rules.'

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Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of our Ideas on the Sublime and Beautiful. In his rather extreme theorizing on the sublime he departed a long way from the *Poetics*, but did not altogether neglect Aristotle. In concluding his special treatment of poetic imitation, Burke writes: 'Aristotle has spoken so much and so solidly upon the force of imitation, in his *Poetics*, that it makes any further discourse upon this subject the less necessary.'[1] In his *Hints for an Essay on the Drama*, Burke clearly indicates that, had he further pursued the subject, he would have made good use of the *Poetics*.[2]

Daniel Webb (1719?–1798), whose *Remarks on the Beauties of Poetry* came out in 1762, was deeply interested in the relationship between poetry and music, and, among other things, in the effect of both upon the emotions—a subject that also interested Aristotle.[3] Webb was familiar with the Greek text of the *Poetics*,[4] but his writings scarcely offer any new interpretations of poetic theory.

Like Webb, James Moor (1712–1779) made much of the relationship between music and poetry. His essay, *On the End of Tragedy according to Aristotle* (1763), attempts a new explanation of the tragic *catharsis*. Dissatisfied with the explanations of Dacier and his English followers, Moor holds that the *catharsis* of the *Poetics* is not a purgation of the specific tragic passions pity and fear, but rather a removal, or clearing-away, of human sufferings.[5] With great erudition, though not with entire con-

[1] Burke, *Works*, London, 1887, 1.123.

[2] See Burke, *ibid.* 7.150, 153. His whole conception of the 'sublime' and the 'beautiful' probably owes much to Aristotle's remarks on the tragic passions of pity and fear; for he thinks of fear, or terror, as the fundamental passion of the 'sublime,' and connects pity with the 'beautiful.'

[3] Aristotle's discussion of an emotional *catharsis* brought on by music is in the *Politics*, Book 8, chapters 6, 7.

[4] See Webb, *Remarks on the Beauties of Poetry*, pp. 103–6. In 1769 Webb published a more elaborate discussion, entitled *Observations on the Correspondence between Poetry and Music*.

[5] Moor's interpretation is based on his reading of the words πάθη and παθήματα. Aristotle, according to Moor, uses πάθη for passions, but in his definition of tragedy (*Poetics* 6.1449b28) he uses παθήματα, meaning 'sufferings.' See Moor, *On the End of Tragedy according to Aristotle*, Glasgow, 1763, pp. 25–6.

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sistency, he tries to show how mental disorders are cured by means of music, and how music is thus an important feature of tragedy:

Tragedy proposes to attain its end by exciting the two passions of pity and terror. The μελοποιία in the chorus contributes exceedingly, by its engaging and commanding influence, to excite these two passions. Passions excited by music are said, as I have shown, to be excited καθάρσει, *by a charm*, and thus, says Aristotle, tragedy, by calling in music to its aid in exciting pity and terror, proposes to *charm* away out of human life such calamities as are exhibited in the drama.[1]

Henry Home, Lord Kames, was a member of the new aesthetic school, but very different in his method from the sturdy, independent Moor. Far from scorning all orthodoxy, Kames, in his *Elements of Criticism* (1762), endeavors to acquaint his readers with the conventional theories of art, thereby helping them to form standards of good taste.[2] Kames is on the side of classical simplicity and restraint, but does not hold that modern writers are bound to follow ancient practice. In the drama, he believes, Unity of Action is necessary, though 'how far the Unities of Time and Place are essential, is a question of greater intricacy.'[3] Kames has great respect for Aristotle, but, since he does not aspire to go beyond the French commentators and critics, no great understanding of the *Poetics*. His emphasis on the moral element in poetry is responsible for many weaknesses in Kames' arguments. For example, he would change Aristotle's classification of tragic plot from *simple* and *complex* to *pathetic* and *moral*, maintaining that a *moral* tragedy is the higher form, since it

[1] Moor, p. 42; see also *Monthly Review* 30 (1764). 63–6. Several years later, Twining refuted Moor's interpretation of παθήματα; see Twining, p. 235.

[2] Boswell gives us a good notion of how the Johnsonian circle received Kames' work: 'Johnson proceeded: "The Scotchman has taken the right method in his *Elements of Criticism*. I do not mean that he has taught us any thing; but he has told us old things in a new way." MURPHY. "He seems to have read a great deal of French criticism, and wants to make it his own; as if he had been for years anatomizing the heart of man, and peeping into every cranny of it." GOLDSMITH. "It is easier to write that book than to read it." ' *Boswell's Life of Johnson*, ed. by George Birkbeck Hill, Oxford, 1887, 2.89–90.

[3] Kames, *Elements of Criticism*, Edinburgh, 1788 (7th ed.), 2.410.

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commands terror as well as pity.[1] To the student of Aristotle's *Poetics* Kames is not an important writer, but, as one of the last adherents to neo-classical French standards and, at the same time, an advocate of the new aesthetics, he undoubtedly stimulated English readers to a renewed interest in critical problems, and so is of some interest to us.

Another Scot, Hugh Blair (1718–1800), was even more conventional than Kames. In the *Critical Dissertations on the Poems of Ossian* (1763), Blair stretches Aristotle's method to cover an examination of *Fingal*; he tests the poem by the principles of epic poetry laid down in the *Poetics*, and decides that it has all the 'essential requirements of a true and regular Epic.'[2]

Despite critics like Blair, the day was past when Aristotle could rule as the supreme authority on all poetical matters, ancient or modern. John Brown (1715–1766), who in 1764 published a *History of the Rise and Progress of Poetry*, contended that the word of the Stagirite was no longer law. Brown fully realized his temerity in doubting the time-honored author of the *Poetics*, yet in his book he dares to say: 'Aristotle is often admirable, generally judicious, yet sometimes perhaps mistaken, even in his judgment of men and things relative to his own country.'[3]

Horace Walpole preferred the irregular beauties of Shakespeare and Milton to the neo-classical writings. A letter of 1765 contains the following patriotic declaration:

All that Aristotle or his superior commentators, your authors, have taught us, has not yet subdued us to regularity; we still

[1] See Kames, *Elements of Criticism* 2.372 ff.

[2] 'Examined even according to Aristotle's rules, it [*Fingal*] will be found to have all the essential requisites of a true and regular Epic; and to have several of them in so high a degree, as at first view to raise our astonishment on finding Ossian's composition so agreeable to rules of which he was entirely ignorant.' See Blair's Dissertation, p. 24—added to James MacPherson's *Fingal*, London, 1762. In his *Lectures on Rhetoric*, first published in 1783, Blair makes occasional use of the *Poetics*.

[3] Brown, *History of the Rise and Progress of Poetry*, Newcastle, 1764, p. 119.

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prefer the extravagant beauties of Shakespeare and Milton to the cold and well-disciplined merit of Addison, and even to the sober and correct march of Pope.[1]

Edward Young, in his *Conjectures on Original Composition* (1759), shows a distinctly modern taste for natural genius, and a distrust of neo-classical rules. His critical judgments are usually independent, but when he comes to the problem of the right effect of tragedy the influence of Aristotle appears. In discussing the failure of Addison's *Cato* to arouse any tears save Cato's own, Young explains that 'those two throbbing pulses of the drama, by which alone it is shown to live, *terror* and *pity*, neglected through the whole, leave our unmolested hearts at perfect peace.'[2]

In the eighteenth century it was hard to be independent of Aristotle when discussing the effect of tragedy, for the tragic *catharsis* of the *Poetics* was familiar to men who had never read a word of the treatise. Robert Dodsley, whose enemies maintained that he knew no criticism, nothing of Aristotle,[3] shows an appreciation of the proper tragic passions in his ode, *Melpomene, or the Regions of Terrour and Pity* (1758). Moreover, his tragedy *Cleone* (1758) is said to have excited terror and pity so powerfully, that when Mrs. Siddons later revived it, it was not to be endured.

In Samuel Johnson we find the most complete expression of English criticism during the last half of the century. Dr. Johnson represents the ideal towards which John Dennis vainly strove; for now, as Johnson's charge, Criticism is no longer a malignant deity, but the 'eldest daughter of Labour and Truth':

She was at her birth committed to the care of Justice, and brought up by her in the palace of Wisdom. Being soon distinguished by the celestials for her uncommon qualities, she was

[1] *Letters of Horace Walpole*, ed. by Mrs. Paget Toynbee, Oxford, 1903–5, 6.201 Cf. 10.132; 12.359.
Cf. Maurice Morgann, *An Essay on the Dramatic Character of Sir John Falstaff* (1777), in D. Nichol Smith, p. 251.
[2] See Young, pp. 87–9.
[3] See Ralph Straus, *Robert Dodsley*, London 1910, pp. 239–40.

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appointed the governess of Fancy, and empowered to beat time to the chorus of the Muses, when they sung before the throne of Jupiter.[1]

Being a great student of antiquity, Johnson based his literary judgments on sound classical principles; being a most humane lover of literature, he was never blind to real merit though it departed from these classical principles. When he examined Milton's *Samson Agonistes*, an avowed attempt to reproduce ancient tragedy, he tested the poem by Aristotle's canons; when he examined the plays of Shakespeare, he turned from formal criticism to a sympathetic appreciation of natural genius. Usually Johnson's point of view was classical, but he was entirely capable of romantic expression; in *Rasselas* he presents a discussion of poetry that is essentially romantic.[2] Johnson did not bow down to the 'rules.' If the Prologue to *Irene*, which was spoken by Garrick, expresses Johnson's own sentiments, he attributed the recent decline of English drama to the stiff artificiality of neo-classicism:

> Then crushed by rules, and weakened as refined,
> For years the power of Tragedy declined;
> From bard to bard the frigid caution crept,
> Till Declamation roared whilst Passion slept.

On the other hand, Johnson was an active spokesman for Aristotle's doctrines. Save for his Preface to Shakespeare, in 1765, his best-known criticisms are Aristotelian in method. Though his discussions of Milton's poetry doubtless owe much to Addison, Johnson did not follow Addison in attempting to emulate 'Longinus,' but tried to retain the scholarly precision of Aristotle, without, to be sure, lapsing into the frigidity of the 'rules.'

In his criticisms, Johnson calls poetry an imitative art[3] which must form a perfect whole with, as Aristotle demands, a definite beginning, middle, and end:

Such is the rule laid down by this great critic for the disposition of the different parts of a well-constituted fable. It must

[1] Johnson, in the *Rambler*, No. 3.
[2] See Imlac's discourse on poetry in ch. 10.
[3] See Johnson, *Lives of the English Poets* 1.19.

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begin where it may be made intelligible without introduction, and end where the mind is left in repose, without expectation of any further event. The intermediate passages must join the last effect to the first cause by a regular and unbroken concatenation: nothing must be therefore inserted which does not apparently arise from something foregoing, and properly make way for something that succeeds it.[1]

On a thorough examination of *Samson Agonistes*, Johnson decides that Milton's tragedy does not fulfil the necessary requirements:

This is undoubtedly a just and regular catastrophe, and the poem, therefore, has a beginning and an end which Aristotle himself could not have disapproved; but it must be allowed to want a middle, since nothing passes between the first act and the last that either hastens or delays the death of Samson. The whole drama, if its superfluities were cut off, would scarcely fill a single act; yet this is the tragedy which ignorance has admired, and bigotry applauded.[2]

Johnson is less severe in judging another masterpiece of Milton, for he decides that *Paradise Lost* is, in the true sense, a great work of art:

To the completeness or integrity of the design nothing can be objected; it has distinctly and clearly what Aristotle requires, a beginning, a middle, and an end. There is perhaps no poem of the same length from which so little can be taken without apparent mutilation. Here are no funeral games, nor is there any long description of a shield. The short disgressions at the beginning of the third, seventh, and ninth books might doubtless be spared; but superfluities so beautiful who would take away, or who does not wish that the author of the *Iliad* had gratified succeeding ages with a little knowledge of himself? Perhaps no passages are more frequently or more attentively read than those extrinsic paragraphs; and, since the end of poetry is pleasure, that cannot be unpoetical with which all are pleased.[3]

When he turns to Shakespeare, who, Johnson believes, knew no rules of the ancients,[4] he finds that the poet, whether consciously or not, achieves the all-important Unity of Action in his best plays:

[1] Johnson, in the *Rambler*, No. 139.
[2] *Ibid.* Cf. *Lives of the English Poets* 1.188–9.
[3] Johnson, in *Lives of the English Poets* 1.175.
[4] See Johnson, *Preface to the Edition of Shakespeare*, in D. Nichol Smith, p. 121.

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His plan has commonly what Aristotle requires, a beginning, a middle, and an end; one event is concatenated with another, and the conclusion follows by easy consequence. There are perhaps some incidents that might be spared, as in other poets there is much talk that only fills up time upon the stage; but the general system makes gradual advances, and the end of the play is the end of expectation.[1]

Johnson holds that, since action is the essential feature of epic and dramatic poetry, the most important element in an epic poem or a drama is the plot or fable. For the drama, Johnson, like Aristotle, prefers the complex plot—'an intrigue regularly perplexed and regularly unraveled.'[2] In his critical examination of plays Johnson adopts the customary procedure by Plot, Character, Sentiments, and Diction.

Johnson may have conceived of an emotional *catharsis* proper to comedy; he says that Shakespeare unites the 'powers of exciting laughter and sorrow.'[3] Thanks to Boswell, we know what he thought about Aristotle's doctrine of the tragic *catharsis*:

I introduced Aristotle's doctrine in his *Art of Poetry*, of 'the κάθαρσις τῶν παθημάτων, the purging of the passions,' as the purpose of tragedy. 'But how are the passions to be purged by terror and pity?' (said I ,with an assumed air of ignorance, to incite him to talk, for which it was often necessary to employ some address). JOHNSON. 'Why, Sir, you are to consider what is the meaning of purging in the original sense. It is to expel impurities from the human body. The mind is subject to the same imperfection. The passions are the great movers of human actions; but they are mixed with such impurities, that it is necessary they should be purged or refined by means of terror and pity. For instance, ambition is a noble passion; but by seeing, upon the stage, that a man who is so excessively ambitious as to raise himself by injustice is punished, we are terrified at the fatal consequences of such a passion. In the same manner a certain degree of resentment is necessary; but if we see that a man carries it too far, we pity the object of it, and are taught to moderate that passion.' My record upon this occasion does great injustice

[1] Johnson, in D. Nichol Smith, pp. 126–7.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 126.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 119.

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to Johnson's expression, which was so forcible and brilliant, that Mr. Craddock whispered me, 'O that his words were written in a book!'[1]

Johnson, in his interpretation of the *Poetics*, was superior to most of his contemporaries; he did not insist upon all the minor Aristotelian doctrines. Unity of Action was essential, but he was not disturbed by Shakespeare's violation of Time and Place. As to the use of a Chorus in tragic drama, he positively disapproved of modern poets meddling at all with this ancient device.[2] On the other hand, Johnson was by no means free from the influence of French neo-classicism. Often he was distressingly didactic; he agreed with Le Bossu that the first task of the epic poet is to find a moral which his fable must illustrate,[3] and that 'admiration' is a 'proper superaddition . . . which latter ages have brought into the drama.'[4] He apparently considered the 'probable' and 'marvelous' two necessary parts of an epic poem.[5]

Upon surveying the whole extent of Johnson's achievement in literary criticism, however, one readily perceives how deep was his learning, and how just and reasonable were his judgments. His critical powers were of the first rank, and the student of criticism, whether or not he has a particular interest in the influence of Aristotle, can only regret that Johnson never fulfilled his plan of writing a *History of Criticism*, 'as it relates to judging of authors, from Aristotle to the present age.' It was to be 'An account of the rise and improvements of that art, of the different opinions of authors, ancient and modern.'[6]

Several other members of the Johnsonian circle were students of the *Poetics*, and probably all of the group were familiar with the leading Aristotelian principles of criticism. The two brothers

[1] *Boswell's Life of Johnson* 3.39.

[2] See Johnson's remarks on Milton's use of the tragic chorus in *Samson Agonistes*, in *Lives of the English Poets* 1.188–9.

[3] *Ibid.* 1.170–1.

[4] Johnson, *Taxation no Tyranny* (1775), in *Works*, London, 1823, 8.160.

[5] See Johnson, *Lives of the English Poets* 1.174. Cf. Addison's remarks, above, p. 105.

[6] *Boswell's Life of Johnson* 4.381, note.

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Warton were possibly the most scholarly. Thomas Warton was a classicist who held that Homer, Aristotle, and Tasso formed good taste, Ariosto bad. In his remarks on the *Faerie Queene*, he regrets that Spenser chose to follow Ariosto, and thus failed to preserve the needful Unity of Action; but he admits: 'Though in the *Faerie Queene* we are not satisfied as critics, yet we are transported as readers.'[1] Thomas Warton was sufficiently interested in Aristotle to pry into the mediæval Arabic versions of his writings, not forgetting the Arabic tradition of the *Poetics*.[2]

Joseph Warton, an enthusiastic admirer of Aristotle, brought a wide reading and deep learning to the pursuit of literary criticism. He had studied the commentators and critics, of whom he ranked Le Bossu first; but he would not have the modern commentaries serve as substitutes for the original texts; the chief reason why contemporary critics were superficial, in his opinion, was the exaggeration of French authority. In the *Adventurer* he warns his countrymen:

> Let no one, however, deceive himself in thinking that he can gain a competent knowledge either of Aristotle or Sophocles from Bossu or Brumoy, how excellent soever these two commentaries may be.[3]

In his criticism Joseph Warton always contends that the Greeks are the best masters to teach the laws of poetry. He terms the *Odyssey* the 'justest pattern of a ligitimate epopee,'[4] and Aristotle the 'first and best of critics.'[5] He particularly admires both the *Rhetoric* and *Poetics* for the calm detachment with which Aristotle treats of the passions.[6] In discussing the characters of Shakespeare's *Tempest*, Warton begins his paper with a quotation from the *Poetics*, contending that in the characters, as well as in the incidents of the play, a writer should aim

[1] Thomas Warton, *Observations on the Faerie Queene of Spenser*, London, 1754, p. 13.
[2] See Thomas Warton, *On the Introduction of Learning into England*, a dissertation prefixed to his *History of English Poetry*, 1774–81.
[3] Joseph Warton, in the *Adventurer*, No. 49 (1753).
[4] *Ibid.*, No. 83.
[5] For the remarks of Warton on Pope's praise of Aristotle, see above, p. 95, note.
[6] See Joseph Warton, *Essay on the Genius and Writings of Pope* 1.171.

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at a necessary or a probable effect.[1] He commends Shakespeare's unity of action, time, and place, and even attempts to defend the probability of the monster, Caliban.

More important than his fairly conventional remarks in the *Adventurer* is the information Joseph Warton, as schoolmaster at Winchester, offers on the classical training of the English schoolboy. The pupils, in addition to reading, translating, and interpreting the best writers, had to write critical papers on 'Homer, Sophocles, Demosthenes, Aristotle's *Poetics*, or Longinus —an exercise not of the memory, but judgment.'[2] Warton himself says of the *Poetics*:

To attempt to understand poetry without having diligently digested this treatise, would be as absurd and impossible as to pretend to a skill in geometry without having studied Euclid.[3]

Other associates of Johnson were less pronounced admirers and followers of Aristotle. Oliver Goldsmith, an avowed liberal, held that English taste should never be restrained by any laws except those of its own making, and vigorously protested against the neo-classical 'rules.'[4] His essay, *A Comparison between Laughing and Sentimental Comedy*, attacks the sentimental rubbish of eighteenth-century tragi-comedy; but in part it is an appeal to ancient authority—to Aristotle, whose distinction between comedy and tragedy is highly commended.[5] Gibbon, who was little occupied with classical criticism, called Aristotle 'le père de la critique.'[6] David Garrick was sufficiently interested in Aristotle's dramatic criticism to preserve Dryden's notes on Rymer.[7] Samuel Foote

[1] See Joseph Warton, in the *Adventurer*, No. 97; cf. *Poetics* 15.1454^{a}33–4.

[2] Joseph Warton, *Essay on the Genius and Writings of Pope* 2.450–1.

[3] *Ibid.* 1.171.

[4] See Goldsmith, *Works*, ed. by Peter Cunningham, London, 1854, 2.73.

[5] *Ibid.* 3.342–4; cf. 4.328.

[6] Gibbon, *Miscellaneous Works*, ed. by Lord Sheffield, London, 1814, 4.37; cf. 4.119, 127, 509.

[7] See Johnson, *Lives of the English Poets* 1.471; above, p. 60.

For conventional remarks on criticism in Garrick's correspondence see his *Private Correspondence*, London, 1831–2, 1.58, 257; 2.209–11; *Some Unpublished Correspondence of David Garrick*, ed. by George Pierce Baker, Boston, 1907, p. 11.

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also was familiar with the Aristotelian traditions.[1] Sir Joshua Reynolds was alive to the current theories of poetic art. His *Discourses* contain numerous passages on the imitation of nature, but there is no conclusive evidence that he ever studied the *Poetics* at first hand; perhaps he relied on James Harris for his knowledge of ancient criticism.[2] George Colman (1732–1794), dramatist and friend of Garrick and Johnson, had a scholarly acquaintance with the *Poetics*,[3] and even his plays betray some evidence that Aristotle had influenced his theory of drama. In the Advertisement to his adaptation of *Philaster*, which was acted at Drury-Lane in 1763, he writes:

If to move the passions of pity and terror are the two chief ends of tragedy, there needs no apology for giving that title to the play of *Philaster*.

Most of the writers in the periodical publications modeled on the *Spectator* and *Rambler* imitated as well the critical methods of Addison and Johnson. Henry Mackenzie (1745–1831), the 'Northern Addison,' the chief contributor to the *Mirror* and the *Lounger*, occasionally made use of the *Poetics*.[4] Richard Cumberland (1732–1811), the popular dramatist, was the grandson of Richard Bentley, some of whose books he inherited, and evidently used; for he was a classical scholar of no mean ability. In the *Observer* (first printed in 1785), almost the last imitation of the *Spectator*, Cumberland offers an Aristotelian review of *Samson Agonistes* in which he treats Milton much more leniently than did Johnson. In fact, Cumberland intended his paper to stand as a reply to the unfavorable criticism of the *Rambler*.[5] In subse-

[1] See *Memoirs of Samuel Foote*, ed. by William Cooke, London, 1805, 3.161, 166, 190. Cf. Francis Gentleman, *Dramatic Censor*, London, 1770, 1.309.

[2] See Reynolds, *Discourses*, Glasgow and London, 1924, pp. 134, 274; Discourse XIII entire.

[3] See Colman's translation of Horace, *The Art of Poetry, an Epistle to the Pisos*, London, 1783. Apparently Colman never doubted that Aristotle was Horace's master. Cf. Colman, in the *Adventurer*, No. 90; in the *Connoisseur* (by Colman and Bonnell Thornton), No. 120.

[4] See Mackenzie, in the *Mirror*, No. 80 (1780); in the *Lounger*, Nos. 27, 28 (1785).

[5] See Cumberland, in the *Observer*, No. 76.

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quent numbers of the *Observer* Cumberland's articles on the origin of the drama utilize the concise remarks in the *Poetics* on early Greek drama.[1]

James Harris (1709–1780), according to Johnson, was a 'sound sullen scholar,' but a 'prig, and a bad prig.' Under this stigma the after-reputation of Harris has suffered. He was, however, an industrious grammarian and critic, and during his life-time of great influence in scholarly circles. In his youth Harris imbibed a prejudice against Aristotle, and neglected his writings;[2] but he must have undergone a remarkable conversion, for his *Philological Inquiries*, a history of criticism beginning with Plato and Aristotle, is largely Aristotelian.[3] His discussion of drama at times is little more than a paraphrase of the *Poetics* with modern illustrations.[4] Harris was too familiar with the French critics, and too fond of the 'rules,' to offer the best interpretations of Aristotle and his doctrines, but he did much to enhance that ancient author's reputation among those who were favorably inclined towards 'classical taste.'

James Beattie (1735–1803) was as staunch as Harris in defending the classics and Aristotle. In his *Essays on Poetry and Music*, Beattie attempts to answer the modern rebels:

> It was pleaded against me that taste is capricious, and criticism variable; and that the rules of Aristotle's *Poetics*, being founded in the practice of Sophocles and Homer, ought not to be applied to the poems of other ages and nations. I admitted the plea, as far as these rules are local and temporary; but asserted that many of them, being founded in nature, were indispensable, and could not be violated without such impropriety as, though overlooked by some, would always be offensive to the greater part of readers, and obstruct the general end of poetical composition; and that it would be no less absurd for a poet to violate the *essential* rules of his art, and justify himself by an appeal from the tribunal of

[1] See Cumberland, in the *Observer*, Nos. 126, 127, 131, 135, 141.

[2] See Harris, *Works*, London, 1803, 1.xii–xiii.

[3] Harris recommends Dacier's version to those students of the *Poetics* who do not read Greek. Harris himself read the works of the 'Father of Criticism' in the edition of Sylburg. See *Philological Inquiries*, pp. 47, 117.

[4] See *Philological Inquiries*, pp. 138 ff.

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Aristotle, than for a mechanic to construct an engine on principles inconsistent with the laws of motion, and excuse himself by disclaiming the authority of Sir Isaac Newton.[1]

James Burnett, Lord Monboddo (1714–1799), was appreciably influenced by the philosophical labors of Harris; he attempted an inquiry into all languages and literatures in six large volumes entitled, *Of the Origin and Progress of Language.*[2] Almost all the critical theories of the ancients are scattered about through this curious, badly-organized work; so the reader continually meets allusions to Aristotle and the *Poetics*.

Being first a philosopher and then a critic, in his analysis of language into words as significant sounds[3] Monboddo prefers the authority of Aristotle's *De Interpretatione;* but when he comes to metaphorical expression,[4] he turns to Chapter 22 of the *Poetics*. Since he is more concerned with linguistics and style than with the formal examination of works of literary art, there is relatively little of Aristotle's method in Monboddo's criticism. One specific example of the Scottish philosopher's critical acumen will suffice. Monboddo seems to share the belief that beauty depends upon magnitude as well as on order:

An heroic poem, such as the *Iliad* or *Odyssey*, is a much finer thing than a tragedy, because it is a whole, as well as a tragedy, but of much greater extent and variety, and containing many *peripeteias* and surprising changes of fortune; whereas tragedy has but one.[5]

[1] Beattie, *Essays on Poetry and Music*, Edinburgh, 1778, p. 6.

On April 26, 1784 William Cowper writes to John Newton: 'In Blair we find a scholar, in Beattie both a scholar and an amiable man; indeed so amiable, that I have wished for his acquaintance ever since I read his book. Having never in my life perused a page of Aristotle, I am glad to have had an opportunity of learning more than (I suppose) he would have taught me from the writings of two modern critics.' See Cowper's *Correspondence*, ed. by Thomas Wright, London, 1904, 2.196.

[2] The second, revised, edition was published at Edinburgh, 1774–1792.

[3] See Monboddo 2.27–29.

[4] *Ibid.* 3.33, 37–39.

[5] *Ibid.* 4.20–1; cf. 4.409–10, note. See *Poetics* 6.1450^{b}36–7; 5.1449^{b}12; 23.1459^{a}31–7; 24.1459^{b}1–16.

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To the student of Aristotle, the most striking feature of Monboddo's huge treatise is his obvious assumption that his readers will be familiar with the *Poetics*.

Vicesimus Knox (1752–1821) also was a defender of the classical school of criticism. Evidently the classical school at the close of the century needed defenders. Knox was for moderation; he did not approve of the 'rules,' and thought that Shakespeare, in spite of his lack of critical refinement, rose superior even to such giants of the drama as Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides.[1] Knox admired Aristotle, however, and deplored the neglect Aristotle's writings were suffering.[2] In one of his literary essays, he assigns as the reason for this neglect the difficulty of translating Aristotle's works into English (he has the *Rhetoric* particularly in mind):

> We certainly have no translations of him in our language but such as add to his obscurity, misrepresent him greatly, and bring his name into disgrace.[3]

The complaint of Knox against poor English translations of Aristotle is but another instance of a widespread realization in England that the popular translations and commentaries that had served long, if not well, sadly needed replacement. In 1788 Henry James Pye issued the first English version of the *Poetics* worthy of the name; Pye's own words are:

> The version of Dacier's translation into English can hardly be called our own; and that which was published by an anonymous writer in 1775, though some detached pieces are faithfully rendered, is in general as much beneath criticism as it is above comprehension.[4]

[1] See Knox, *Essays, Moral and Literary* (16th ed.), London, 1808, 2.155–6; cf. 3. 290–1. The *Essays* were first published in 1778.

[2] Pinkerton ('Robert Heron'), the Scottish antiquary and historian, is savage in his attacks upon the ancients. He condemns the 'base tricks and cavils' of Aristotle. The *Poetics* is a 'crude and indigested performance.' See Robert Heron, *Letters of Literature*, London, 1785, pp. 137–8, 230, 508 ff.

[3] Knox, *Essays, Moral and Literary* 3.154.

[4] Pye, p. v.

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Pye did not contend that he was a scholar; he regarded his work as merely an attempt to clarify the precepts of the *Poetics* for English as well as classical readers, and to enable the lover of English poetry to judge whether or not Aristotle's principles actually conformed to truth and nature.[1] Pye hoped to help correct the gross misrepresentation Aristotle had suffered from the popular acceptance of French 'rules.' Like most of the intelligent critics of his generation, he believed that in the future Aristotle would have to stand upon his own merits. It was only just to Aristotle, therefore, that his famous treatise should be presented to the public as accurately as possible.

Pye's commentaries are not very original; they usually go over old ground. The notion of the place of Spectacle in the theatre, however, is worth noting. Pye follows Aristotle in emphasizing the literary merit of drama, but does not agree that Spectacle is the least artistic element in the theatrical performance:

> Perhaps it may admit a doubt whether even Aristotle, if he had seen a Garrick in Lear or a Siddons in Isabella, would have given the preference to the unhappy catastrophe, or asserted that a tragedy attained its end by reading as well as in representation.[2]

Though Pye is strongly in favor of theatrical effect, he does not admire the scene-painter; he prefers the Spectacle of the actors to painted scenery.[3] After a long discussion of Aristotle's preference of tragedy to epic poetry, he—with one reservation, the constant exception of Shakespeare—finally bows to the popular eighteenth-century acclamation of the epic poem:

> General criticism has pronounced (and I think very justly) that a good epopee is the highest effort of human genius.[4]

Pye should have the credit of the first good English translation of the *Poetics*. His work was soon eclipsed, however, by Twining's translation in 1789, which became the standard English

[1] See Pye, p. vii.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 117.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 531.
[4] *Ibid.*, p. 557.

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version, and so remained up to very recent times. Nor was Twining's fame confined to English-speaking people, for some of the best German students of Aristotle paid tribute to his scholarship.[1] With Twining, Aristotelian criticism in England for the first time became well-organized. Without neglecting the work of his predecessors, Italian, Dutch, French, German—he knew virtually all of them—Twining nevertheless preserved an independent attitude, always striving to determine what Aristotle himself might mean. He did not feel bound to follow even the idolized Le Bossu;[2] he thought it high time to discard the 'technical jargon of *implex* fables, used by Addison and others, after the French writers.'[3]

Turning to his own theory, we find that Twining does not relish the demand that poetry should furnish profit:

> Nor does he [Aristotle] anywhere appear to me to give any countenance to an idea which rational criticism has now pretty well exploded—that *utility* and *instruction* are the end of poetry.[4]

His critical instinct leads him to agree with Aristotle that, in emotional power, tragedy has the advantage over epic poetry; but, the influence of Johnson being strong, he finally admits that the epic poem is probably the best example of poetic art.[5] Twining has read Lessing's interpretation of Aristotle's tragic *catharsis*, and disagrees with its moral emphasis; Twining's own rendering —'effecting through pity and terror the correction and refinement of such passions'[6]—seems not very different from Lessing's 'purification,'[7] but in his notes[8] he recognizes two legitimate interpretations of *catharsis*, the medical and the moral. With the

[1] See J. W. Draper, *Aristotelian 'Mimesis' in England*, in *P.M.L.A.* 36(1921). 399.
[2] Twining (p. 284) writes: 'Mr. Harris, in his *Philol. Inquiries*, p. 145, etc., seems to have deserted Aristotle for Le Bossu, who, with little reason, in my opinion, passed with him, as well as with Lord Shaftesbury, for "Aristotle's best interpreter." '
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 282.
[4] *Ibid.*, p. 561.
[5] See Twining, pp. 563–5.
[6] *Ibid.*, p. 75.
[7] See Lessing, *Dramatic Notes*, No. 77.
[8] See Twining, pp. 231 ff.

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passages in Aristotle's *Politics* and Milton's preface to *Samson Agonistes* in mind, he obviously leans toward the medical, or pathological, explanation.

As to the place of Spectacle in drama, now becoming a very serious problem in the modern theatre, Twining apparently supports Aristotle. He wonders what Aristotle would say to a species of English drama, namely pantomime, in which the element of Spectacle, instead of being at the bottom of the scale, is the very soul of the play, so that here the carpenter takes precedence of the poet.[1]

Twining's English version, then, is a great improvement on any before it; and it probably has done more than any other one translation to make the *Poetics* familiar to English-speaking people. In point of scholarship, however, Twining's book must yield to the Greek-and-Latin edition of Tyrwhitt, the great edition of 1794 which to-day no student of the *Poetics* can afford to overlook. Tyrwhitt's conclusions anticipate almost every one of the present-day interpretations. His explanation of the tragic *catharsis*, to select the most famous example, has, according to Bywater, all the essential points of the 'modern' pathological theory.[2]

Thus at the end of the eighteenth century, after a continuous warfare of critical opinions in England, and despite many fantastic notions about Aristotle's doctrines on poetic art, English criticism gained, in Tyrwhitt's work, one of the notable editions of the *Poetics*, and, in Twining's, a highly respectable English translation. If the contemporary admiration of natural genius and the force of the 'romantic movement' were fast triumphing over the outworn 'rules,' we may yet be sure that, with an excellent apparatus for the study of the *Poetics*, that study would not be altogether neglected in the next generation.

[1] See Twining, p. 317.

[2] Tyrwhitt, after referring to the *Politics*, Book 8, ch. 7, says of the tragic emotions of pity and fear (p. 125): 'Qui in tragoediis vehementissime excitantur, non ex eo nutriri et validiores effici, quod Plato criminabatur, *de Rep.* L.iii.init., sed contra levari et exhauriri; et proinde affectuum horum purgationem opus esse proprium et quasi finem tragoediae.'

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CHAPTER V

THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

The labors of Twining and Tyrwhitt on the *Poetics* grew out of a renewed study of Greek. In the English schools and universities Greek authors were coming to dispute the rule of the Romans. In the sixteenth century, so Roger Ascham has told us, Sir John Cheke taught the boys at St. John's College, Cambridge, to admire the Greek writers; Coleridge has told us how, at the close of the eighteenth century, James Boyer of Christ's Hospital taught him to prefer Demosthenes to Cicero, and Homer and Theocritus to Virgil. Coleridge, like many of his fellows, was as eager as Ascham to taste the feast set before him: 'During several years of my youth and early manhood I reverenced those who had reintroduced the manly simplicity of the Greek, and of our own elder poets.'[1]

A student does not often examine the structure of the best Greek poetry and oratory without meeting Aristotle, and Coleridge soon became an admirer of the 'Stagirite.' Was it not Coleridge who first said that 'every man is born an Aristotelian or a Platonist'?[2] Coleridge, as a poet, obviously had a greater admiration for the Platonist; the Aristotelian may come to master the affairs of the understanding, but, without the Platonic inspiration, the Platonic enthusiasm, can he ever raise himself to the highest plane? Many a young Englishman of the day often liked to think of himself as a Platonist shaking off all earthly trammels, and soaring aloft to the realm of pure ideas, leaving behind him the common sense of Aristotle to reach the throne of living, essential truth, where Plato ruled supreme. Some of Aristotle's cool common sense, however, will usually prove a valuable aid to the aspiring Platonist, as Coleridge, for one, well knew. Possibly he liked to think of himself as a Platonist with a good Aristotelian basis:

[1] Coleridge, *Complete Works*, ed. by Shedd, New York, 1884, 3.146.
[2] Coleridge, *Table Talk*, July 2, 1830, in *Works* 6.336.

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Yet what a mind was Aristotle's—only not the greatest that ever animated the human form!—the parent of science, properly so called, the master of criticism, and the founder or editor of logic! But he confounded science with philosophy, which is an error. Philosophy is the middle state between science, or knowledge, and sophia, or wisdom.[1]

Upon examining his criticism, we find that Coleridge regards poetry as an idealized imitation of Nature: 'It is not a copy, but an imitation of Nature. This is the universal principle of the fine arts.'[2] When he says that poetry is the 'blossom and the fragrancy of all human knowledge, human thoughts, human passions, emotion, language,'[3] the nineteenth-century Platonist is echoing the rhapsodies of Renaissance critics; but on occasion Coleridge recalls the sober statements of Aristotle:

A poem is that species of composition which is opposed to works of science, by proposing for its *immediate* object pleasure, not truth; and from all other species (having this object in common with it)—it is discriminated by proposing to itself such delight from the whole as is compatible with a distinct gratification from each component *part*.[4]

Sometimes he avowedly follows Aristotle; his theory of comedy, for example, is based on Aristotelian doctrines, though not entirely on the *Poetics:*

I think Aristotle has already excellently defined the laughable, τὸ γελοῖον, as consisting of, or depending on, what is out of its proper time and place, yet without danger or pain.[5]

[1] Coleridge, *Works* 6.336.
[2] *Ibid.* 4.41; cf. 4.330–6.
[3] *Ibid.* 3.381; cf. Wordsworth, *Prefaces, etc.* [Preface to 'Lyrical Ballads' (1800)], in the Oxford Wordsworth, p. 938.
[4] Coleridge, *Works* 3.371; cf. 4.19–20.
[5] *Ibid.* 4.276. Cf. *Poetics* 5.1449ª 32–7.
Cf. Coleridge's definition of comedy in his *Table Talk* (*Works* 6.485): 'Laughter is a convulsion of the nerves, and it seems as if nature cut short the rapid thrill of pleasure on the nerves by a sudden convulsion of them, to prevent the sensation becoming painful. Aristotle's definition is as good as can be—surprise at perceiving any thing out of its usual place, when the unusualness is not accompanied by a sense of serious danger. Such surprise is always pleasurable; and it is observable that surprise accompanied with circumstances of danger becomes tragic.'
Coleridge's definition has much in common with Aristotle's *Problems* 35.6. See Lane Cooper, *An Aristotelian Theory of Comedy*, p. 163, pp. 249–50.

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When Coleridge wishes to emphasize an important philosophic principle in poetical theory he often resorts to Aristotle. On the universal truth of poetry he is content to follow, with some elaboration, the remarks in the *Poetics*:

I adopt with full faith the principle of Aristotle that poetry, as poetry, is essentially ideal, that it avoids and excludes all accident; that its apparent individualities of rank, character, or occupation must be representative of a class; and that the persons of poetry must be clothed with generic attributes, with the common attributes of the class; not with such as one gifted individual might possibly possess, but such as from his situation it is most probable beforehand that he would possess.[1]

But Coleridge is not so accurate as the author of the *Poetics*; his enthusiasm sometimes leads him into carelessness. He quotes Aristotle as saying that poetry is the most philosophical art: 'To this accidentality I object as contravening the essence of poetry, which Aristotle pronounces to be *σπουδαιότατον καὶ φιλοσοφώτατον γένος*, the most intense, weighty, and philosophical product of human art; adding as the reason, that it is the most catholic and abstract.'[2] Aristotle, however, merely says that poetry is more philosophical and of graver import than history: *φιλοσοφώτερον καὶ σπουδαιότερον ποίησις ἱστορίας ἐστίν*.[3]

Coleridge was not the most accurate of critics; but it is significant that, Platonist that he was, he did not neglect the scientific principles of poetic criticism that he found in Aristotle. Even when dealing with the indefinable genius of the great Shakespeare, in his lectures on the drama, he does not lose sight of the *Poetics*. He grows impatient over the current loose talk about the 'pure child of nature,' the 'wild' and 'irregular' Shakespeare.

[1] Coleridge, *Works* 3.399.
[2] *Ibid.* 3.468–9; cf. 3.527.
[3] *Poetics* 9.1451^{b}5–6.

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He agrees with Lessing,[1] from whom he probably took a good share of his admiration for Aristotle, that Shakespeare's plays come much closer to the principles laid down in the *Poetics* than do most of the 'regular' dramas. Coleridge does not make the mistake of trying to show that *Hamlet* and *Othello* were written in imitation of Sophocles, and in obedience to Aristotle,[2] though he cannot resist the temptation to compare the English plays with the Greek.

Coleridge had a distinctly 'modern' notion of the difference between Greek and modern art. The Greeks revere the finite, the moderns the infinite; for organic forms must change according to races and tastes. Coleridge was one of the earliest English exponents of the popular contrast between the Parthenon and a Gothic cathedral, between Sophocles and Shakespeare.[3] Coleridge admired Shakespeare and the romantic drama, but also admired the Attic drama. He therefore saw no reason why the modern reader, understanding the fundamental differences, should not appreciate both.

Early in his lectures on Shakespeare,[4] Coleridge, with great satisfaction, calls attention to the famous passage in Plato's *Symposium* suggesting that it is natural for the same genius to excel in both tragic and comic poetry. Shakespeare, therefore, is the ideal dramatic poet. The minor Unities of Time and Place were mere inconveniencies, accidents, attached to the Athenian stage. Unity of Action, on the other hand, is a necessary prin-

[1] Coleridge (*Works* 3.557) writes: 'He [Lessing] proved that in all the essentials of art, no less than in the truth of nature, the plays of Shakespeare were incomparably more coincident with the principles of Aristotle than the productions of Corneille and Racine, notwithstanding the boasted regularity of the latter.' Cf. Lessing, *Dramatic Notes*, No. 81.

Lessing stood as the best interpreter of Aristotle in the early nineteenth century. As Lockhart remarks, 'Aristotle and Lessing remain, but Chamfort and all the wits of the *Mercure* have perished.' See *The Life and Letters of John Gibson Lockhart*, by Andrew Lang, London, 1897, 1.169.

[2] See Coleridge, *Works* 4.51.

[3] August William Schlegel is probably responsible for the contrast. See his *Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature*, trans. by John Black, revised by A. J. W. Morrison, London, 1879, p. 23.

[4] See Coleridge, *Works* 4.23.

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ciple of the drama that Shakespeare carefully observes; though, in speaking of Shakespeare's art, we might better call his unity 'homogeneity,' 'proportionateness,' or 'totality of interest.'[1] Coleridge does not pretend to find Grecian symmetry in Shakespeare, but does find an artistic harmony, a harmony comparable to that of a fine natural landscape. Shakespeare departs only from the 'accidents' of Greek drama; his best poetry has the true unity that is essential to any great work of art.

Coleridge's interpretations are never bound by the 'rules'; they represent the new attempt in scholarship and criticism to rediscover the fundamental laws of poetic art, though Coleridge's scholarship was not of the best. If Aristotle offers aid, then by all means use Aristotle; but no one is bound to follow the *Poetics* because it was written by the great Aristotle, or because it has the sanction of many generations of famous scholars and critics. Formal method, in the Aristotelian sense, actually fills a relatively small space in Coleridge's criticism. He often begins, as in his lectures on Shakespeare, with a few generalizations based on the *Poetics*; but he devotes most of his attention to the individual beauties of the plays. Once his fundamental position is taken, he adopts the more popular method of 'Longinus' that deals with beauty, taste, and style.

Wordsworth, in the Preface to the second edition of the *Lyrical Ballads* (1800), writes:

Aristotle, I have been told, has said that Poetry is the most philosophic of all writing. It is so; its object is truth, not individual and local, but general and operative; not standing upon external testimony, but carried alive into the heart by passion; truth which is its own testimony, which gives competence and confidence to the tribunal to which it appeals, and receives them from the same tribunal.

Doubtless Coleridge was the man who told Wordsworth about the passage from Aristotle, for Wordsworth copies Coleridge's misreading of the *Poetics*.[2] There is no evidence in Wordsworth

[1] See Coleridge, *Works* 4.110.
[2] See above, p. 143.

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to indicate an early first-hand knowledge of the *Poetics*. His theory of poetry—the emphasis on simple, natural language, on incidents and characters drawn from humble, even rustic life—is directly opposed to the doctrines of neo-classical disciples of Aristotle. The spirit of his philosophical discussions of 'poet' and 'poetry' is in striking contrast to the conventional remarks of poet-critics like Sidney, Jonson, Dryden, and Pope; though occasionally Wordsworth falls into the Platonic eulogy of poetry as the 'breath and finer spirit of all knowledge.' In his own search for the true principles of poetic art, and from his own observation of man and nature, Wordsworth often closely approaches the fundamental precepts of the *Poetics*. Although it is impossible always to determine what is Wordsworth's own original theory, and what are the notions he picked up from Coleridge or some other critical friend, there is no doubt of Wordsworth's sincerity. Apart from the statement, already quoted, that poetry deals with universal elements, which presumably comes from Coleridge, Wordsworth calls poetry an imitative art, the 'image of man and nature'[1]; he believes that the human delight in acquiring knowledge is a fundamental reason for man's delight in poetry;[2] and finally he holds that the three requisites of a 'legitimate whole' in poetry are 'a beginning, a middle, and an end.[3] The foregoing illustrations do not argue that Wordsworth knew and used the *Poetics*; but, to the reader who approves of Wordsworth's theories, they must offer some support to Aristotle's principles as well. It looks as if Words-

[1] Wordsworth, Preface to second edition of *Lyrical Ballads*.

[2] *Ibid.* Wordsworth writes: 'The knowledge both of the Poet and the Man of science is pleasure; but the knowledge of the one [the poet] cleaves to us as a necessary part of our existence, our natural and unalienable inheritence.' Cf. *Poetics* 4.1448b4–19.

[3] Wordsworth, Preface to the edition of 1815.

In a sonnet entitled *Apology*, one of the *Ecclesiastical Sonnets* (2.26), Wordsworth writes:

> Unsoftened, undismayed
> By aught that mingled with the tragic scene
> Of pity or fear.

Cf. Coleridge's line in *Love*: 'She wept with pity and delight.'

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worth, by his own independent observation, arrived at some of the same conclusions Aristotle long ago reached.

Wordsworth's neglect of the *Poetics* is an indication that many of the best literary men in England were turning away from formal criticism. Even Coleridge, with a strong predisposition towards Aristotle's method, never would have allied himself with the Aristotelians. Aristotle the Critic, at the beginning of the century, was again forced back into the schools, to the care of the schoolmasters and the classical scholars.[1] The poets, essayists, and novelists, having made strenuous efforts to free themselves from neo-classical shackles, were unwilling to bear any yoke. The authority of Aristotle still lived, but a romantic predilection for natural genius everywhere ignored his ancient laws.

George Walker (1734?–1807), although a conservative critic of the old school, who defended solid academic learning against the 'nature' of Rousseau, exemplifies the change that had come about. His essay, *On Tragedy and the Interest in Tragical Representations*, contains no direct appeal to the authority of Aristotle Hume and the French philosophers have displaced the author of the *Poetics*. Walker, in the essay, *On the Machinery of the Ancient Epic Poem*, pleads for the new liberty:

> More than two thousand years have passed since the days of Aristotle; but the system of Aristotle is still an imperial law, and is an interdict on genius in the walk of epic poetry. . . . The *Poetics* and other critical works of Aristotle, founded upon the models of an old and almost barbarious antiquity, have, indeed, bound genius in chains.[2]

Southey went further, and to extremes; he had no sympathy with formal criticism, and little admiration for the time-honored

[1] Thomas Taylor the 'Platonist' is credited with an English translation of the *Poetics*, *Rhetoric*, and *Nicomachean Ethics* in 1811. According to the Introduction to the edition of the same works in 1818, the treatises maintain a high degree of reputation, and are studied 'even in the present frivolous age' at Oxford. See *The Rhetoric, Poetic, and Nicomachean Ethics of Aristotle*, trans. by Thomas Taylor, London, 1818, 1.i ff.

[2] Walker, *Essays on Various Subjects*, London, 1809, 2.76–7.

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heroic poem. In the Preface to the first edition of *Madoc* (1805) he evidently prefers the Welsh triads to Aristotelian 'rules':

It assumes not the degraded title of Epic; and the question, therefore, is not whether the story is formed upon the rules of Aristotle, but whether it be adapted to the purposes of poetry.

William Blake was one of the most valiant members of the 'extreme right,' in Professor Saintsbury's phrase, the 'highfliers of the Army of Romanticism.' In his short comment, *On Homer's Poetry* (*c.* 1820), Blake eloquently attacks the academic mentors of classical structure and 'morality' in poetry:

As unity is the cloak of folly, so goodness is the cloak of knavery. Those who will have unity exclusively in Homer come out with a moral like a sting in the tail. Aristotle says characters are either good or bad; now goodness or badness has nothing to do with character. An apple-tree, a pear-tree, a horse, a lion are characters; but a good apple-tree or a bad is an apple-tree still; a horse is not more a lion for being a bad horse; that is its character; its goodness or badness is another consideration.

It is the same with the moral of a whole poem as with the moral goodness of its parts. Unity and morality are secondary considerations, and belong to philosophy and not to poetry, to exception and not to rule, to accident and not to substance. The ancients called it eating of the tree of good and evil.

The classics! It is the classics, and not Goths nor monks, that desolate Europe with wars.[1]

Blake conceived of poetic unity as existing more in the part than in the whole, or as well in the part as in the whole. Similarly Leigh Hunt saw the small things in poetry, the isolated poetical beauties, His essay called *What is Poetry?* is chiefly valuable for the good taste displayed in selecting illustrations; the larger beauty of a great composition, the perfect whole, receives no attention; there is no discussion of structure, classical or otherwise. Hunt, however, is of exceptional interest as, in the words of William Archer, 'the first English dramatic critic, in our present accepta-

[1] *Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. by Geoffrey Keynes, London, 1927, p. 767.

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tion of that curiously inaccurate term.'[1] Differing from the literary critics like Coleridge, Hazlitt, and Arnold, Hunt was a *theatrical* critic who virtually wrote from the pit.[2] Yet his journalistic papers on acting, on the actual performances of the plays in London theatres, contain evident marks of traditional criticism. A persistent notion with Hunt, for example, is that the drama is the 'most perfect imitation of human life.'[3] His criticism takes cognizance of the tragic *catharsis*: 'The audience on the first night were electrified for the moment with the truest terror and pity.'[4] But Hunt's intimate association with audiences led him to modify the traditional explanation of the tragic function:

> But I recollected that, however critics may talk about the sufficiency of terror and pity to create tragic delight, all ages have agreed by their own measure of approbation to demand a certain degree of refinement as a necessary recommendation of those feelings.[5]

Hunt observed the superficiality of his profession, and possibly felt the need of some solid basis of judgment, of a sound method of criticism. He knew that a man could not learn to be a profound critic in five minutes:

> Let Aristotle and Quintilian hide their huge volumes in dismay, and confess the superiority of a criticism, which, like the magic word *Sesame* in the Arabian Nights, opens to us a thousand treasures in a breath![6]

If the classification of Coleridge is correct, Shelley is the best example in the century of the born Platonist. Without the Aristotelian bent of Coleridge, without the theatrical practicality of Leigh Hunt, but with no trace of Blake's disdain of the an-

[1] See Hunt, *Dramatic Essays*, ed. by William Archer and Robert W. Lowe, London, 1894, p. vii.
[2] Hunt was critic for the *News* from 1805 to 1807, for the *Examiner* from 1808 to 1813, and for the *Tatler* from 1830 to 1832.
[3] Hunt, *Dramatic Essays*, p. 1.
[4] *Ibid.*, p. 58.
[5] *Ibid.*, p. 56.
[6] *Ibid.*, pp. 126–7.

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cients, Shelley was a 'Grecian' romanticist. His poetry and his fragmentary criticism both express the highest admiration for the culture of the Greeks. Shelley believed that in spirit and system the poetry of the Greeks is superior to that of any other nation. The Greeks are the only poets who have reached complete harmony and perfection of form; in other words, they are the only poets who consistently create a perfect whole. Even the best of the modern writers fall below them in sustained beauty:

> As a poet, Homer must be acknowledged to excel Shakespeare in the truth, the harmony, the sustained grandeur, the satisfying completeness of his images, their exact fitness to the illustration and to that to which they belong.[1]

Of the ancient critics of poetry, Plato stands supreme:

> [Plato's] excellence consists especially in intuition, and it is this faculty which raises him far above Aristotle, whose genius, though vivid and various, is obscure in comparison with that of Plato.[2]

As a result, Shelley's own theory, as evinced in his *Defense of Poetry* and in his prefaces, goes behind Aristotle to the master Plato; the *Ion* and *Symposium* are his guides, not the *Poetics*. Yet in the Preface to *Prometheus Unbound*, Shelley defines poetry as the art of representative imitation: 'As to imitation, poetry is a mimetic art. It creates, but it creates by combination and representation.'[3] Poetry is superior to history, since it is more universal and more beautiful.[4]

Since he did not frequent theatres, Shelley's interest in the drama was almost completely divorced from the stage. He regarded the great dramas as poems to be read; and, like so many of his contemporaries, he constructed a literary theatre—as

[1] Shelley, *On the Literature, the Arts, and the Manners of the Athenians*.
[2] Shelley, Preface to his translation of Plato's *Banquet*.
[3] Cf. Shelley, *Defense of Poetry*, ed. by Albert S. Cook, Boston, 1890, p. 10: 'A poem is the very image of life expressed in its eternal truth.'
[4] *Ibid.*, pp. 10–11.

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Byron would have it, a 'mental theatre.'[1] For the comparison, in the *Defense of Poetry*, of Shakespearean drama with the *Oedipus Rex* and *Agamemnon*, Shelley selects *King Lear*—probably the best choice for one who wishes to draw a literary comparison, but hardly the choice of a theatrical critic. Aristotle, let us recall, recognizes the dramatic effect of reading a play, but mainly considers the direct appeal to an audience. An eloquent passage in the *Defense*, more inspired by the philosophy of Plato than by the analytical science of Aristotle, deals with the function of tragedy:

> Sorrow, terror, anguish, despair itself, are often the chosen expressions of an approximation to the highest good. Our sympathy in tragic fiction depends on this principle; tragedy delights by affording a shadow of that pleasure which exists in pain. This is the source also of the melancholy which is inseparable from the sweetest melody. The pleasure that is in sorrow is sweeter than the pleasure of pleasure itself. And hence the saying: 'It is better to go to the house of mourning than to the house of mirth.'[2]

Shelley was by nature antagonistic to all formal criticism, which he regarded as a shackle to poetic genius:

> Poetry and the art which professes to regulate and limit its powers cannot subsist together. Longinus could not have been the contemporary of Homer, nor Boileau of Horace.[3]

Byron's criticism of poetry[4] neglects the *Poetics*, but clearly indicates that Byron himself sympathized with many of the classical doctrines. He was familiar with Horace, and knew the traditions of Aristotle and 'Longinus.' He would not dismiss the ancients without a hearing:

> Yet whether right or wrong the ancient rules,
> It will not do to call our fathers fools![5]

The various references to Aristotle in *Don Juan*, facetious as they are, at least show Byron's interest in the ancient laws of

[1] See below, p. 153–4.
[2] Shelley, *Defense of Poetry*, p. 35.
[3] Shelley, Preface to *The Revolt of Islam*.
[4] See Clement Tyson Goode, *Bryon as Critic*, Weimar, 1923, pp. 106 ff.
[5] Byron, *Hints from Horace* 431–2.

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poetry. In the first canto the author advertises his new creation as an epic poem, in twelve books, after the style of Virgil and Homer:

> All these things will be specified in time,
> With strict regard to Aristotle's rules,
> The *Vade Mecum* of the true sublime,
> Which makes so many poets and some fools:
> Prose poets like blank-verse, I'm fond of rhyme,
> Good workmen never quarrel with their tools;
> I've got new mythological machinery,
> And very handsome supernatural scenery.[1]

If ever he shall condescend to prosaic criticism, Byron assures his reader, he will carry precepts to the highest pitch:

> I'll call the work 'Longinus o'er a Bottle,
> Or, Every Poet his own Aristotle.'[2]

Byron's poem will not be written in the modern fashion; it follows stricter models:

> Thou shalt believe in Milton, Dryden, Pope;
> Thou shalt not set up Wordsworth, Coleridge, Southey;
> Because the first is crazed beyond all hope,
> The second drunk, the third so quaint and mouthey.[3]

Byron could not long remain a 'regular' poet, but he passed through a spell of regularity, during which he tried to write dramas that conformed to the 'rules.' In *Marino Faliero* (1820), *Sardanapalus* (1821), and *The Two Foscari* (1821), he aimed to construct tragedies that at least approached the Unities, 'conceiving that with any very distant departure from them, there may be poetry, but can be no drama.'[4] Byron did not share the

[1] Byron, *Don Juan* 1.201. Cf. *Don Juan* 1.120:

> Of Aristotle and the rules 't is fit
> To beg his pardon when I err a bit.

And see *Don Juan* 3.111:

> I'll prove that such the opinion of the critic is
> From Aristotle *passim*—See ΠΟΙΗΤΙΚΗΣ.

[2] *Ibid.* 1.204.
[3] *Ibid.* 1.205.
[4] Byron, Preface to *Sardanapalus*; cf. Preface to *Marino Faliero*.

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contemporary adulation of the early English dramatists;[1] at least he did not believe that they offer good literary models. A young author, he says, when writing a tragedy, must look elsewhere for his guides:

I am, however, persuaded that this is not to be done by following the old dramatists, who are full of gross faults, pardoned only for the beauty of their language; but by writing naturally and *regularly*, and producing *regular* tragedies, like the *Greeks*; but not in imitation—merely the outline of their conduct, adapted to our own times and circumstances, and, of course, *no* Chorus.[2]

Byron's own method in tragic drama goes back to the ancients:

My dramatic simplicity is *studiously* Greek, and must continue so; no reform ever succeeded at first. I admire the old English dramatists; but this is quite another field, and has nothing to do with theirs. I want to make a *regular* English drama, no matter whether for the stage or not, which is not my object—but a *mental theatre*.[3]

Byron was always acutely conscious that he was not working for the English theatre. Referring to *Marino Faliero*, he writes to John Murray in 1820: 'It is too long and too regular for your stage. The persons too few, and the *unity* too much observed.'[4] Later, in 1821, he announces: 'I have sent Murray a new tragedy, ycleped *Sardanapalus*, writ according to Aristotle—all save the Chorus—I could not reconcile me to that.'[5] His submission to authority in *Sardanapalus*, however, is not to Aristotle but to the neo-classical 'rules': 'I have strictly preserved all the unities hitherto, and mean to continue them in the fifth [act], if possible;

[1] Byron did not consider Shakespeare the best of models: 'I look upon him to be the worst of models, though the most extraordinary of writers.' (See Byron's *Letters and Journals*, ed. by Rowland E. Prothero, London, 1898–1901, 5.323.) Of the early dramatists, Byron excepts Ben Jonson, 'who was a scholar and a classic.' (*Ibid.* 5.218.)

[2] *Ibid.* 5.217–8.

[3] Byron, *ibid.* 5.347.

[4] *Ibid.* 5.81.

[5] *Ibid.* 5.310.

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but not for the stage.'[1] His chief concern in writing tragedies for a 'mental theatre' is to 'mind the Unities, which are my great object of research.'[2]

Despite his efforts to be 'regular,' Byron followed neither Aristotle nor the neo-classical 'rules.' Aristotle recognizes the effect of a tragedy from a mere reading, but would hardly have subscribed to a 'mental theatre.' Even if Byron had written for the stage, he would scarcely have been successful; the romanticists never would have accepted his 'regularity,' and the classicists would easily have seen that his plays were not 'Grecian.' Byron's dramatic poetry is a combination of nineteenth-century style and eighteenth-century theory, and is neither Greek nor Aristotelian. For examples of tragedy Byron turned to Seneca rather than to Sophocles;[3] for dramatic theory he rather depended on Rymer than on the *Poetics*.[4] His experiments in 'regular' drama are important, however, since they illustrate the hold that a formal criticism, ultimately based on Aristotle, still exerted upon writers and critics who were unwilling to cast their lot whole-heartedly with the romantic rebels.

Thomas Moore, whenever he approached the question of ancient authority, took somewhat the same position as his friend Byron. One of his poems embodies a quotation from Aristotle's *Rhetoric*;[5] but his statement that 'Unity of Place is one of Aristotle's rules,'[6] is evidence of slight acquaintance with the *Poetics*.

Byron and Thomas Campbell rose to the defence of Pope in a reopening of the quarrel started by Joseph Warton; both matched modern standards of taste against the ancient as upheld by Wil-

[1] Byron, *Letters and Journals* 5.299; cf. 5.301.
[2] *Ibid.* 5.324.
[3] *Ibid.* 5.173.
[4] *Ibid.* 5.284: 'I must remark from Aristotle and Rymer, that the hero of tragedy and (I add, *meo periculo*) a tragic poem must *be guilty*, to excite "terror and pity," the end of tragic poetry.'
[5] See Moore, *There's not a look, a word of thine*. Cf. *Genius and Criticism*, 43–4:

Saint Aristotle, what wild notions!
Serve a 'ne exeat regno' on him.

[6] Moore, *Memoirs, Journal, and Correspondence*, ed. by Lord John Russell, London, 1853–6, 2.152.

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liam Lisle Bowles. We have sketched Byron's theories. Campbell apparently was not so well-informed about true ancient criticism, although his opinion of the dramatic unities sounds sensible: 'I conceive that it may be said of those unities as of fire and water, that they are good servants, but bad masters.'[1] His understanding of Aristotelian criticism was somewhat hazy; most of his information probably came from Schlegel. Bowles, on the other hand, availed himself of a superior knowledge of the ancients. In his letters to Byron and Campbell, his favorite authority is 'Longinus,' for here Bowles is a champion of the 'sublime' in poetry;[2] but he does not neglect Aristotle,[3] for he contends that structure is the chief virtue of poetry. He still clings to the eighteenth-century admiration for epic poetry; if an epic poem evinces as much structure as a smaller work, then the epic poet is the greater poet. 'And,' says Bowles, with an air of finality, 'I need not hesitate to affirm this, for it is the opinion of all critics, from Aristotle to Dr. Johnson.'[4] Bowles has the spirit of the old school of critics; if Pope is to rank with Shakespeare and Spenser, then, he says, 'Let Longinus seek another source of the sublime, Aristotle bend to the new Stagirite, and Pope himself learn the true principles of criticism from his last editor.'[5]

Francis Jeffrey's articles in the *Edinburgh Review* further demonstrate the reaction to neo-classical 'rules.' In 1822, reviewing Byron's *Sardanapalus*, *The Two Foscari*, and *Cain*, Jeffrey writes:

[1] Campbell, *Essay on English Poetry*, in *Specimens of the British Poets*, London, 1819, 1.151.

[2] See Bowles' letter to Campbell, in the *Pamphleteer* 20 (1822). 573: 'The principles, then, I have built on, when closely examined, will be found to be those of Longinus and Horace, which are derived primarily from Eternal Nature.'

[3] See Bowles, in the *Pamphleteer* 20 (1822). 553; and compare his *Monody on the Death of Dr. Warton:*

> . . . . . He [Shakespeare], ruling wide
> His visionary world, bids terror fill
> The shivering breast, or softer pity thrill
> Ev'n to the inmost heart.

[4] Bowles, *Letters to Lord Byron on a Question of Poetical Criticism*, London, 1822 (3rd. ed.), p. 86.

[5] Bowles, *A Final Appeal to the Literary Public relative to Pope*, London, 1825, pp. 88–9.

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For ourselves, we will confess that we have had a considerable contempt for those same Unities, ever since we read Dennis's criticism of *Cato* in our boyhood—except, indeed, the Unity of Action, which Lord Byron does not appear to set much store by.[1]

Though Jeffrey is now chiefly remembered for a lack of sympathy and understanding in his treatment of contemporary romantic poets, his opinions were, in his own day, conservative; his criticism of Byron's attempts at dramatic 'regularity' is typical of the spokesman of moderation:

When the moderns tie themselves down to write tragedies of the same length and on the same simple plan, in other respects, with those of Sophocles and Aeschylus, we shall not object to their adhering to the Unities; for there can, in that case, be no sufficient inducement for violating them. But, in the mean time, we hold that English dramatic poetry soars above the Unities, just as the imagination does.[2]

Sir Walter Scott's literary criticism is usually as conservative as Jeffrey's, but much more tolerant of ancient traditions. Scott had a contempt for the 'rules,' but a sincere admiration for many of Aristotle's principles. In his Life of Dryden (1808), he condemns the neo-classical methods of heroic poetry, as practised in Dryden's day:

To insist that every epic poem shall have the plan of the *Iliad* and *Aeneid*, and every tragedy be fettered by the rules of Aristotle, resembles the principle of an architect who should build all his houses with the same number of windows and of stories.[3]

In his *Essay on the Drama* (first published in the supplement to the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, in 1819), Scott's sympathies are with the Spaniards and Englishmen who disregarded the orthodox 'rules,' and against the French who 'assumed the yoke of Aristotle.'[4] And Scott has little patience with the French formalists, and little use for the Unities, except the essential Unity of Action:

[1] Jeffrey, *Contributions to the Edinburgh Review*, London, 1844, 2.345.
[2] *Ibid.* 2.345.
[3] Scott, in *Works of John Dryden*, ed. by Scott and Saintsbury, Edinburgh, 1882, 1.441.
[4] Scott, *Miscellaneous Prose Works*, Edinburgh, 1834–6, 6.282.

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The first dramatic Unity is that of Action; and, rightly understood, it is by far the most important. A whole, says Aristotle, is that which has a beginning, middle, and end.[1]

Having himself a true genius of story-telling, Scott perceived that Unity of Action, or unified structure in the plot, was the most important element in dramatic composition—an element no writer can afford to disregard. One of his letters declares:

The Unities of Time and Place have always appeared to me fopperies, as far as they require close observance of the French rules. Still, the nearer you can come to them, it is always, no doubt, the better, because your action will be more probable. But the Unity of Action—I mean that continuity which unites every scene with the other, and makes the catastrophe the natural and probable result of all that has gone before—seems to me a critical rule which cannot safely be dispensed with.[2]

Scott's opinion of Aristotle's doctrines is essentially that which a thoughtful person to-day would adopt:

The opinions of Aristotle must be judged of according to the opportunities and authorities which lay open before him; and, from the high critical judgment he has displayed, we can scarce err in supposing he would have drawn different results in different circumstances.[3]

Walter Savage Landor, an almost extravagant admirer of Shakespeare, and yet devoted to the Greek ideal, combined classical with romantic tendencies. While few men of his day had a more wholesome appreciation of contemporary literature, Landor's writings often imply a longing for the clarity and reason of the eighteenth century. The *Imaginary Conversations* contain much eulogy of the Attic spirit; possibly the best example for our purpose is found in the dialogue between Vittoria Colonna and Michelangelo:

[1] *Ibid.* 6.298.

[2] Scott's letter to Allan Cunningham, in *Life of Sir Walter Scott*, by John Gibson Lockhart, Edinburgh, 1902–3, 6.283; cf. 6.258.

[3] Scott, *Miscellaneous Prose Works* 6.312.

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VITTORIA. If great poets build their own temples, as indeed they do, let us at least offer up to them our praises and thanksgivings, and hope to render them acceptable by the purest incense of the heart.

MICHELANGELO. First, we must find the priests, for ours are inconvertible from their crumbling altars. Too surely we are without an Aristoteles to precede and direct them.

VITTORIA. We want him not only for poetry, but philosophy. Much of the dusty perfumery, which thickened for a season the pure air of Attica, was dissipated by his breath. Calm reasoning, deep investigation, patient experiment, succeeded to contentious quibbles and trivial irony. The sun of Aristoteles dispersed the unwholesome vapor that arose from the garden of Academus. Instead of spectral demons, instead of the monstrous progeny of mystery and immodesty, there arose tangible images of symmetry. Homer was recalled from banishment; Aeschylus followed; the choruses bowed before him, divided, and took their stands.[1]

But Landor believed in the modern independence; he was not one to prescribe laws to the poets and playwrights. Apparently he did not hold to the convention of 'pity and fear' in tragedy,[2] and he ridiculed the eighteenth-century notion that the Chorus is a necessary part of tragic drama. In a passage referring to Hurd's commendation of the Chorus,[3] he says:

Would it not be quite as advisable to drop carefully a few drops of laudanum on a lump of sugar, to lull the excitement of the sufferers by the tragedy? The Chorus in Milton comes well provided with this narcotic.[4]

If not a 'romantic,' Landor was yet modern. Few authors have spoken so eloquently or so convincingly in praise of the modern romantic poets, or expressed so much confidence in their poetry:

Every year there is more good poetry written now, in this our country, than was written between the *Metamorphoses* and the

[1] Landor, *Complete Works*, ed. by T. Earle Welby, London, 1927, 3.34; cf. *Aristoteles and Callisthenes*, *ibid.* 1.196.

[2] See Landor's dialogue of the Duke de Richelieu and others, *ibid.* 6.104.

[3] See above, p. 123.

[4] Landor, *Southey and Landor*, in *Works* 5.303.

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Divina Commedia. We walk no longer in the cast-off clothes of the ancients, often ill sewn at first, and now ill fitting.[1]

William Hazlitt, like Coleridge, was a disciple of the new German literary criticism. In both Coleridge and Hazlitt we see the changed point of view that English students of literature and aesthetics had adopted; the Italian, the Dutch, even the French critics, were now displaced by Lessing and Schlegel. Hazlitt was a serious critic with a well-developed historical sense, and not without a method. He evidently adopted Schlegel's distinction between the classical and the modern spirit in art: 'Sophocles differs from Shakespeare as a Doric portico does from Westminster Abbey. The principle of the one is simplicity and harmony, of the other richness and power.'[2] He gave the advantage to the Greeks for *form*, to the moderns for *movement* and *color*.

Nearly all his critical essays contain sober touches from Aristotle, though Hazlitt was also given to occasional outbursts of 'Platonic' enthusiasm. The essay, *On Poetry in General* (1818), after classifying man as a 'poetical animal,' gives a definition of poetry that is based on the *Poetics*: 'Poetry, then, is an imitation of nature, but the imagination and the passions are a part of man's nature.'[3] Hazlitt, in his criticism, often makes use of Aristotle. Tragedy, in the first place, is a 'representation of *a serious action*.'[4] Taking his interpretations from Lessing and Schlegel, Hazlitt commends the traditional pity and fear of tragedy, and explains the tragic *catharsis* as a purification: 'Aristotle has observed that tragedy purifies the affections by terror and pity.'[5] Elsewhere he explains that tragedy 'exhausts the

[1] Landor, *Archdeacon Hare and Walter Landor*, in *Works* 6.34.

[2] Hazlitt, *On the Spirit of Ancient and Modern Literature*, in *Collected Works*, ed. by Waller and Glover, London, 1902–6, 5.347.

[3] *Ibid.* 5.3. Cf. the essay, *On Imitation*, *ibid.* 1.72–7.

[4] Hazlitt, *View of the English Stage*, *ibid.* 8.305.

[5] *Ibid.* 1.123. Cf. *On Modern Comedy* (1815), *ibid.* 1.13: 'Aristotle has long since said that tragedy purifies the mind by terror and pity; that is, substitutes an artificial and intellectual interest for real passion.'

And compare Lessing, *Dramatic Notes*, Nos. 77, 78; Schlegel, *Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature*, p. 68.

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terror or pity by an unlimited indulgence of it.'[1] Hazlitt's conservatism, although he owed much to the dramatic criticism of Germany, led him to condemn modern German tragedy. The formality of his condemnation reminds one not a little of Dennis, Addison, and Johnson:

> The action is not grave, but extravagant; the fable is not probable, but improbable; the favorite characters are not only low, but vicious; the sentiments are such as do not become the person into whose mouth they are put, nor that of any other person; the language is a mixture of metaphysical jargon and flaring prose; the moral is immorality.[2]

Hazlitt, then, was one of the conservative critics who still recognized certain laws of poetical composition. Compared with the immense volume of his criticism, there is little direct use of Aristotle's method, for Hazlitt gave most of his attention to matters of style; but he did not belong with those warmer spirits who disclaimed all guides except their own imagination and inspiration:

> I remember Mr. Godwin writing to Mr. Wordsworth that 'his tragedy of Antonio could not fail of success.' It was damned past all redemption. I said to Mr. Wordsworth that I thought this a natural consequence; for how could any one have a dramatic turn of mind who judged entirely of others from himself? Mr. Godwin might be convinced of the excellence of his work; but how could he know that others would be convinced of it, unless by supposing that they were as wise as himself, and as infallible critics of dramatic poetry—so many Aristotles sitting in judgment on Euripides![3]

Macaulay, in one of his early writings, *On the Athenian Orators* (1824), pays tribute to Aristotle's scientific method of criticism:

> He was the great fashioner of the intellectual chaos; he changed its darkness into light, and its discord into order. He brought to literary researches the same vigor and amplitude of mind,

[1] Hazlitt, *On Poetry in General*, in *Collected Works* 5.5.
[2] Hazlitt, *Lectures on the Age of Elizabeth* (*On the German Drama*), *ibid.* 5.360.
[3] Hazlitt, *Farewell to Essay-Writing* (1828), *ibid.* 12.326. Godwin's *Antonio* failed at Drury Lane Theatre in 1800.

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to which both physical and metaphysical science are so greatly indebted. His fundamental principles of criticism are excellent. To cite only a single instance—the doctrine which he established, that poetry is an imitative art, when justly understood, is to the critic what the compass is to the navigator. With it he may venture upon the most extensive excursions. Without it he must creep cautiously along the coast, or lose himself in a trackless expanse, and trust at best to the guidance of an occasional star. It is a discovery which changes a caprice into a science.[1]

The young Macaulay cannot agree with all of Aristotle's conclusions, yet generously adds: 'With all his deficiencies Aristotle was the most enlightened and profound critic of antiquity.'[2]

When he embarked on his own notable voyage of literary criticism, Macaulay left Aristotle's 'compass' behind. Indeed it seems likely that he never opened the *Poetics* after he left college. In his detailed account of the classical writings he read in India, the *Poetics* is not mentioned.[3] The remarks appended to his copy of *Oedipus Rex* show, however, that his tenacious memory still retained some of Aristotle's critical doctrines:

Nothing can exceed the skill with which the Discovery is managed. The agony of Oedipus is so unutterably grand; and the tender sorrow in which his mind at last reposes after his daughters have been brought to him is as moving as anything in the Greek Drama.[4]

Thomas De Quincey's *Brief Appraisal of the Greek Literature*[5] affirms that in 1838 no question was more discussed than the relative merits of ancient and modern literature. The early furor of romanticism had subsided, and the ancient standards of taste were again demanding attention. De Quincey, in fact, displays a

[1] Macaulay, *Critical and Miscellaneous Essays*, Philadelphia, 3.405.
[2] *Ibid.* 3.405.
[3] See Macaulay's letters (1834–5) to Thomas Flower Ellis, in *Life and Letters of Lord Macaulay*, by G. O. Trevelyan, Leipzig, 1876, 2.212. Macaulay (*ibid.* 2.231) states that he has read 'Aristotle's *Politics* and a good deal of his *Organon*, besides dipping elsewhere in him.'
[4] *Ibid.* 2.264.
[5] See De Quincey, *Collected Writings*, ed. by David Masson, Edinburgh, 1889–90, 10.289–341.

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very decided antipathy towards rules that are too 'exclusively Grecian,' towards those 'vague *responsa prudentum*, countersigned by the great name, perhaps, of Aristotle.'[1] According to De Quincey, the ancients have usually gained the decision, since only a classical scholar is competent to judge the literature of both civilizations, and a classical scholar is inevitably biased before he begins to judge. What criticism needed in 1838 was a man thoroughly grounded in the classics, yet in sympathy with modern times. De Quincey doubtless thought of himself as such a man. Unfortunately, however, though well-equipped with learning, he lacked the highest order of critical faculties; he did not make good use of his ancient lore. A dramatic criticism of Sophocles' *Antigone* can hardly neglect the leading principles of Attic tragedy, but De Quincey's account of the performance of *Antigone* at Edinburgh in 1846 uses only one minor statement in the *Poetics* (4.1449^{a}26–8): 'It is true, this metre was the common iambic, which (as Aristotle remarks) is the most natural and spontaneous of all metres.'[2]

Henry Hallam was more favorable to the ancients. His *Introduction to the Literature of Europe in the Fifteenth, Sixteenth, and Seventeenth Centuries* (first published in 1837–9) defends Aristotle's doctrines. Hallam may not have plunged very deeply into Aristotelian criticism—he was acquainted with Twining, 'one of the best critics on the *Poetics*'—but he was not one to join in any current disparagement of the ancient critic: 'It is easy to sneer at Aristotle when we have a Shakespeare; but Aristotle formed his rules on the practice of Sophocles.'[3]

John Keble was the eldest of a famous trio of literary men who helped to make Oriel College the centre of the best intellectual life at Oxford. Not so well-known as the critical essays of Matthew Arnold and Cardinal Newman, Keble's Latin lectures on poetry, delivered between 1832 and 1841, while he was Pro-

[1] De Quincey, *Collected Writings* 10.290.
[2] *Ibid.* 10.370. De Quincey mentions the pity and fear of tragedy in a note; see *Theory of Greek Tragedy*, *ibid.* 10.358.
[3] Hallam (2d. ed.), London, 1843, 3.140.

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fessor of Poetry at Oxford, are admirable. In these lectures Keble tries to strike a golden mean between the enthusiasm of Plato and the academic precision of Aristotle; and he succeeds much better than does Coleridge. But, then, Keble was a better scholar than Coleridge; he brought to his study of the *Poetics* a sound knowledge of the *Rhetoric* and *Ethics*, two works necessary to any comment on Aristotle's poetical theories. Keble's firm convictions on the divine origin of poetic genius led him to protestations already familiar to us: poetry is the 'handmaid to imagination and fancy'; it exhibits 'wonderful efficacy in soothing men's emotions, and steadying the balance of their mind.'[1] Poetry is a divine medicine bestowed upon many to give scope to their enthusiasm and relief to their emotions, and yet, at the same time, produces order in them, and controls them. Keble significantly fastens on the one passage in the *Poetics* that alludes to poetic madness:

> I know not indeed whether more learned scholars will endorse my opinion, but it certainly seems to me that even Aristotle, the great founder and admiring supporter of the imitation theory, recognizes, when giving advice to tragedians as to the best way of influencing the emotions, some such line of demarcation among poets as I do: 'We share,' he says, 'the agitation of those who appear to be truly agitated, the anger of those who appear to be truly angry. Hence it is that poetry demands either great natural quickness of parts or an enthusiasm allied to madness.'[2]

Throughout the lectures on poetry Keble usually agrees with Aristotle. He accepts the basic principle that action is the chief element in poetry: 'No doubt to Aristotle, action, as for morality, so for poetry, seemed the one thing needful.'[3] In admiration of Aristotle's method he quotes the synopsis of the *Odyssey* given in the *Poetics*.[4] He maintains, on the authority of Aristotle, that Euripides is the most tragic of poets:

[1] Keble, *Lectures on Poetry*, trans. by Edward K. Francis, Oxford, 1912, 1.21.
[2] *Ibid.* 1.55–6. Cf. *Poetics* 17.1455[a]30–4.
[3] Keble, *Lectures on Poetry* 1.94; cf. 2.264.
[4] *Ibid.* 1.237. Cf. *Poetics* 17.1455[b]17–23.

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I only claim in Aristotle's own words that he stands pre-eminent as 'the most tragic of all poets.' In laying down this opinion, that acute critic, as I apprehend, had in view that aim and end of tragedy which he had himself previously defined, namely, that its purpose was to purge men's feelings and affections by the influences of fear and pity.[1]

On the other hand, as a good Platonist, Keble is free to disagree with Aristotle, and he occasionally does so. While holding that action is all-important in poetry, he believes that the emphasis of Aristotle on the right construction of the plot is too artificial:

I find that all through Aristotle's *Art of Poetry* there is an underlying appeal to the people and the gallery; that invariably it is the external form and feature of the poem, not the inner spirit of the poet, which is looked to and considered; and that this is especially noticeable when Aristotle develops his reasons for holding that in the composition of tragedy the plot should be assigned the chief place. Though he has the air of offering many reasons, yet the sum of them all is contained in this single one: 'Those parts of tragedy, by means of which it becomes most interesting and affecting, are parts of the Fable—I mean Revolutions and Discoveries.' As though, forsooth, the reputation of great poets is to stand or fall by theatrical applause, by the number and lungs of the shouters.[2]

Cardinal Newman naturally adopted towards the *Poetics* an attitude similar to Keble's. In his short essay, *Poetry, with Reference to Aristotle's Poetics* (1829), we have as intelligent an understanding of ancient and modern poetry as the century produced. A well-read classical scholar, sympathetic with contemporary literature, and at the same time a philosopher able to appreciate the subtleties of Aristotle, Newman has seized upon the fundamental aspects of the *Poetics*. Without going into the assumption in the essay that poetry is an idealization of nature, and hence of more universal appeal than history, biography, or even philosophy,[3] let us begin where Newman begins, with the doctrine

[1] Keble, *Lectures on Poetry* 2.234–5. Cf. *Poetics* 13.1453ª29–30.
[2] Keble, *Lectures on Poetry* 2.219. Cf. *Poetics* 6.1450ª33–5.
[3] See Newman, *Poetry, with Reference to Aristotle's Poetics*, ed. by Albert S. Cook, Boston, 1894, pp. 9 ff.

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that action is the most important element in tragedy: 'Aristotle considers the excellence of a tragedy to depend upon its plot—and, since a tragedy, as such, is obviously the exhibition of an action, no one can deny his statement to be abstractedly true.'[1] Newman, however, must qualify Aristotle's dictum:

It is one thing, however, to form the *beau ideal* of a tragedy on scientific principles; another to point out the actual beauty of a particular school of dramatic composition. The Greek tragedians are not generally felicitous in the construction of their plots. Aristotle, then, rather tells us what tragedy should be, than what Greek tragedy really was.[2]

With the scientific spirit of his ancient authority, Newman proposes to investigate the question for himself, and to examine not only Aristotle's doctrines but also the models from which he deduced his doctrines. He finds that in many of the dramas of Aeschylus, Euripides, and even Sophocles, the chief poetic merits do not lie in the Plot, but rather in the 'Characters, Sentiments, and Diction.'[3] The *Oedipus Coloneus* and *Philoctetes*, two of Sophocles' best plays, are obviously weak in plot. The *Oedipus Rex* is admirably constructed, as Aristotle says; but are we to reject Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* and Euripides' *Bacchae* because they are more loosely put together? 'Are they on that account to be rated below the Oedipus, which, in spite of its many beauties, has not even a share of the richness and sublimity of either?'[4] Newman looks for charm in poetry, for the 'purple patches.' Possessed of a romantic sympathy, he would not exalt what he calls ingenious workmanship above free and unfettered effusions of genius:

Let us listen to their harmonious and majestic language, to the voices of sorrow, joy, compassion, or religious emotion—to the

[1] Newman, p. 1.
[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 1–2.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 2. Newman seems to share Aristotle's opinion of the ideal tragic personages; he believes that Romeo and Juliet, Ophelia, the Bride of Lammermoor, Euripides' Clytemnestra, are too good for their fate, and therefore inconsistent with correct poetic beauty—*ibid.*, p. 17.
[4] *Ibid.*, p. 8.

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animated odes of the Chorus. Why interrupt so transcendent a display of poetical genius by inquiries degrading it to the level of every-day events, and implying incompleteness in the action till a catastrophe arrives? The very spirit of beauty breathes through every part of the composition.[1]

There is a marked change in the critical emphasis of Newman's essay. Here we no longer see the quarrel over the relative merits of epic and dramatic poetry, over the proper moral, or even over ancient and modern standards. Newman has caught the investigative spirit of Aristotle. His essay indicates that the best advocates of independence in the nineteenth century actually understood the *Poetics* better than the meticulous Aristotelians of a preceding era. Some readers will regret that Newman leaned to the contemporary neglect of the theatre.[2] From that his dramatic criticism inevitably suffers, for he was too easily led into long digressions upon other types of poetry that were more popular with his fellows than was the drama. As far as it goes, however, his essay offers much satisfactory interpretation of Aristotle, and on some points as telling a criticism as we have yet encountered.

Matthew Arnold, by inheritance, education, and profession, was destined to become the staunchest Aristotelian poet-critic in his century. His distinguished father, Thomas Arnold, was well-read in Aristotle, and saw to it betimes that his son should study the 'Philosopher.'[3] In 1845 the younger Arnold became a fellow of Oriel College, and thus fell heir to the views of Keble and Newman. In 1857 he was elected to the chair of poetry at

[1] Newman, p. 4.

[2] The discussion of Newman's dramatic theories brings to mind the theatrical opinions of his chief enemy, Charles Kingsley. Kingsley was indebted to Schlegel for most of his historical knowledge of the stage; see his *Stage as it once was*, in *Literary and General Essays*, London, 1888. Kingsley offers good Puritan interpretations. For example, he insists on a religious or moral interpretation of the *catharsis*: 'It is good to represent heroical action in verse, and on the stage; it is good to "purify," as old Aristotle has it, "the affections by pity and terror." ' (Kingsley, *Plays and Puritans*, in *Miscellanies*, London, 1859, 2.132.)

[3] See Arthur P. Stanley, *Life and Correspondence of Thomas Arnold*, Boston, 1860, 1.30–1; 2.234.

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Oxford; this he held for ten years, and thus could pursue his critical studies with no great interruption. He soon became the most prominent and most popular champion of the classical spirit in England. He was not a Rymer or a Dennis, but he was a better 'Grecian.' His essay, *On the Modern Element of Literature*,[1] delivered as an inaugural lecture in the chair of poetry, formulates his position in clear terms—the firm belief that the literature of ancient Greece can be a mighty agent of intellectual deliverance for modern times. Arnold himself assumed the chief task of bringing about this intellectual deliverance. His position was sane; he did not insist on the 'rules' of Greek literature, but on accepting the literature itself. Nevertheless, and inevitably, he took over a good share of the ancient critical theories, and therefore Aristotle's doctrines of poetic art constantly reappear in Arnold's discussions of poetry. His most consistent use of Aristotle is seen in the Preface to the first edition of his poems (1853), and in the Preface to his 'classical' tragedy, *Merope* (1858).

In the first place, Arnold contends that the basis of our love of poetry lies in the common human delight in imitation, and in the common human pleasure in learning:

> We all naturally take pleasure, says Aristotle, in any imitation or representation whatever; this is the basis of our love of poetry; and we take pleasure in them, he adds, because all knowledge is naturally agreeable to us; not to the philosopher only, but to mankind at large.[2]

Guided by 'Aristotle's profound observation that the superiority of poetry over history consists in its possessing a higher truth and a higher seriousness (*φιλοσοφώτερον καὶ σπουδαιότερον*),' Arnold establishes his touchstones of the best poetry on the qualities of truth and seriousness.[3] The greatest pleasure in poetry, according to Arnold, will always come from the artistic imitation of actions:

[1] See Arnold, *Essays in Criticism* (Third Series), Boston, 1910.
[2] Arnold, Preface to first edition of poems, in *Poems*, Oxford, 1926, pp. 1–2. Cf. *Poetics* 4.1448b4–17.
[3] Arnold, *The Study of Poetry* (1880), in *Essays in Criticism* (Second Series), London and New York, 1888, p. 21.

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What are the eternal objects of poetry among all nations and at all times? They are actions, human actions, possessing an inherent interest in themselves, and which are to be communicated in an interesting manner by the art of the poet.[1]

The poet's first step is to select a good action. Let the Greeks be his models; they did not neglect the smaller elements, and withal they were masters of the grand style. Further, the Greeks emphasized the action:

Their theory and practice alike, the admirable treatise of Aristotle and the unrivaled works of their poets, exclaim with a thousand tongues: 'All depends upon the subject; choose a fitting action, penetrate yourself with the feeling of its situations; this done, everything else will follow.[2]

The Greeks regarded the whole; we moderns regard the parts. With the Greeks, action predominates over expression; with us, expression predominates over action. The great Shakespeare is a dangerous model,[3] yet he has exerted a tremendous influence upon modern writers, who have accepted his details, from whatever work, without seeing the greater harmony of his best creations. That, Arnold contends, is what makes the details, in the majority of modern poetical works, alone valuable, the composition worthless:

I fearlessly assert that *Hermann and Dorothea*, *Childe Harold*, *Jocelyn*, the *Excursion*, leave the reader cold in comparison with the effect produced upon him by the latter books of the *Iliad*, by the *Oresteia*, or by the episode of Dido. And why is this? Simply because in the three latter cases the action is greater, the personages nobler, the situations more intense; and this is the true basis of the interest in a poetical work, and this alone.[4]

It is not strange, then, that Arnold, in choosing a subject for a venture of his own into tragedy, selected the ancient story of Merope: 'To the effectiveness of the situations which this story

[1] Arnold, Preface to first edition of his poems, in *Poems*, Oxford, 1926, p. 3.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 7. Cf. *On the Modern Element of Literature*, in *Essays in Criticism* (Third Series), p. 77.
[3] Cf. Byron's remarks, above, p. 000.
[4] Arnold, Preface to first edition of poems, in *Poems*, Oxford, 1926, p. 5.

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offered, Aristotle and Plutarch have borne witness.'[1] Arnold does not maintain that the laws of Greek tragedy, as formulated by Aristotle, render all other methods incorrect; but he implies that complete success with other methods is at least doubtful:

The laws of Greek tragic art, therefore, are not exclusive; they are for Greek dramatic art itself, but they do not pronounce other modes of dramatic art unlawful; they are, at most, *prophecies of the improbability of dramatic success under other conditions*. 'Tragedy,' says Aristotle, in a remarkable passage, 'after going through many changes, got the nature which suited it, and there it stopped. Whether or no the kinds of tragedy are yet exhausted,' he presently adds, 'tragedy being considered either in itself, or in respect to the stage, I shall not now inquire.' Traveling in a certain path, the spirit of man arrived at Greek tragedy; traveling in other paths, it may arrive at other kinds of tragedy.[2]

He therefore composes *Merope* with the precepts of Aristotle constantly in mind. He selects the situation and the characters because they best conform to Aristotle's requirements:

Aristotle's profound remark is well-known, that the tragic personage whose ruin is represented should be a personage neither eminently good, nor yet one brought to ruin by sheer iniquity; nay, that his character should incline rather to good than to bad, but that he should have some fault which impels him to his fall. For, as he explains, the two grand tragic feelings, pity and terror, which it is the business of tragedy to excite, will not be excited by the spectacle of the ruin of a mere villain; since pity is for those who suffer undeservedly, and such a man suffers deservedly; terror is excited by the fall of one of like nature with ourselves, and we feel that the mere villain is not as ourselves.[3]

In the preface to *Merope*, Arnold argues at some length for the retention of the Chorus in 'classical' tragedies that are modeled on the dramas of Athens, and not on those of Paris. He believes that the Chorus fulfilled two purposes in Greek tragedy:

[1] Arnold, Preface to *Merope, a Tragedy*, London, 1858, pp. xi–xii; in *Poems*, Oxford, 1926, p. 286. Cf. *Poetics* 14.1454^{a}4–7.

[2] Arnold, Preface to *Merope*, pp. xxxviii–xxxix; in *Poems*, Oxford, 1926, pp. 303–4. Cf. *Poetics* 4.1449^{a}7–15.

[3] Arnold, Preface to *Merope*, p. xxxiii; in *Poems*, Oxford, 1926, p. 300.

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(1) it deepened and harmonized the feelings aroused in the spectator by the dramatic action; (2) it afforded, by its lyric poetry, relief to the tragic intensity of the grand episodes. Here Arnold follows the German Aristotelians rather than Aristotle, for the Greek recommended that the Chorus be treated as one of the agents in the play.

It cannot be said that Arnold's *Merope* is a complete success, though it is a better tragedy than some of its critics have allowed. The effect of the whole, however, is undeniably tame; it fails to excite, in any large measure, the right tragic emotions, as one of Arnold's friends, W. E. Forster, told him. In return Arnold wrote to Forster:

> There is a kind of pity and fear (Kotzebue is a great master of it) which cannot be purified; it is the most agitating and overwhelming, certainly; but, for the sake of a higher result, we must renounce this. Pity and fear of a certain kind—say commiseration and awe, and you will perhaps better feel what I mean—I think *Merope* does excite—as does Greek tragedy in general.[1]

Arnold obviously tried to bring about the tragic effect that Aristotle demands:

> The poem [*Merope*] is a tragedy according to the celebrated definition which has not yet, so far as I know, given place to a better—'Tragedy is the imitation of some action that is serious and entire, and of the proper magnitude, effecting through pity and fear the purification of these feelings of the soul.'
>
> The more you look at that famous definition (Aristotle's) the better you will like it.[2]

The failure of *Merope* lies not so much in method—though modern poets never have been at their happiest in their Grecian moments—as in Arnold's own genius. He was not a great dramatic poet. In fact, he was a victim of the very fault he so shrewdly disclosed in many other modern dramatists; his faculty

[1] Arnold, in *Unpublished Letters of Matthew Arnold*, ed. by Arnold Whitridge, New Haven, 1923, p. 38.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 41.

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lay more in the details of expression than in the mastery of an artistic dramatic whole. Arnold wrote fine lyrical and narrative poems, but never a good drama.

The public reception of *Merope* was naturally disappointing to the author. There was little in the current reviews to please him, with one notable exception; as he says in a letter, 'The *Leader* was very gratifying.'[1] The editor of the *Leader* was George Henry Lewes, himself a distinguished student of Aristotle,[2] and from the outset sympathetic with Arnold's views. With the voice of an Arnold he decried the lack of structure in modern poetry, and the lack of sound method in modern criticism. His vigorous remarks on the popular criticism of Goethe's *Iphigenie* will sufficiently define his position:

> The very phrase with which critics characterize *Iphigenia* is sufficient to condemn them. They tell us it has 'all the repose of Greek tragedy.' Consider for a moment—*repose* in a tragedy! that is to say, calmness in the terrific upheaving of volcanic passions. Tragedy, we are told by Aristotle, acts through terror and pity, awakening in our bosoms sympathy with suffering; and to suppose *this* is to be accomplished by the 'meditative repose which breathes from every verse' is tantamount to supposing a battle-song will most vigorously stir the blood of combatants if it borrow the accents of a lullaby.[3]

Such ardent disciples of Aristotle and Matthew Arnold were rare in their century. There were many Platonists, and countless poets and critics who were otherwise well-read in Greek literature, but, apart from the classical scholars, few avowed admirers of the *Poetics*.

In 1851 Hugh Hamilton reissued Twining's translation of the *Poetics* with a Preface and annotations. Hamilton wished to restore the sound sense of Aristotle to modern criticism, to extend the utility of the *Poetics* to the general reader, and to assist in the cultivation of good literary taste. He believed, too, that Aris-

[1] Arnold, *Letters*, ed. by George W. E. Russell, New York, 1895, 1.68.
[2] See Lewes' book *Aristotle*, London, 1864.
[3] Lewes, *Life and Works of Goethe*, London, 1855, 2.10; cf. 2.20.

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totle's valuable remarks on *unity* would be of material service both to the preacher and the public speaker.[1] The essays of Mark Pattison, who took his baccalaureate degree from Oriel College in 1836, and thus was associated with Keble, Newman, and Arnold, present an academic view of Aristotle's influence. In 1855, Pattison informs us, the study of Aristotle was vigorously and intelligently pursued at Oxford during the first half of the century:

> As the language became more facile, the substance of books so pregnant with instruction as the Greek poets and historians could not but gain on the attention. The theory of the Greek drama, its purport and history, the principles of ancient art, poetic, rhetoric, were intelligently studied. Aristotle soon riveted attention in a peculiar way, and from this time a history of the study of Aristotle in the University is a history of University improvement.[2]

By 1850 the *Poetics* was probably better understood and more carefully studied in English schools and colleges than at any previous time. University study, however, does not always mean popular acceptance. Less academic critics were not so sympathetic with Aristotle's doctrines.

Eneas Sweetland Dallas, in his opinion of the ancient 'rules,' is fairly representative of the current attitude. His own *Poetics* (1852) shows a knowledge, but not an approval, of the Greek treatise. Dallas questions Aristotle's famous principle that poetry is an imitative art:

> Greatly in vogue at one time, the commonplace of criticism, always at hand, and if not always of service, at least always officious, the definition seems now, like a physician in a good old age, to have retired from practice. It is no longer in request.[3]

In his *Gay Science* (1866), Dallas again attacks the theory of imitation; he even ventures to dispute the generally unquestioned doctrine that pity and fear are the proper tragic emotions.[4]

[1] See *The Poetics of Aristotle*, ed. by Hugh Hamilton, Dublin, 1851, pp. 15 ff.
[2] Pattison, *Essays*, ed. by Henry Nettleship, Oxford, 1889, 1.463.
[3] Dallas, *Poetics*, London, 1852, p. 121.
[4] See Dallas, *The Gay Science*, London, 1866, 2.53–4.

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Many of the poets who pretended to 'Grecian' methods paid little or no attention to the *Poetics*. Elizabeth Barrett Browning, for example, named 'Longinus,' Dionysius of Halicarnassus, and Quintilian as the three great critics of antiquity, ignoring both Aristotle and Horace.[1] Robert Browning, a better student of the classics than his wife, did not so neglect Aristotle.[2] If he had taken nothing else from the *Poetics*, Browning would impress us by his doctrine of the tragic *catharsis*. *Aristophanes' Apology* (1875), being chiefly concerned with discussions of dramatic theory and practice, offers the best comment on this doctrine, but there are allusions to it in other poems as well.

In this poem Browning is attracted by the problem of tragic and comic form, and of the fundamental distinction between the two—if there is a clear-cut distinction.[3] Apparently he accepts Aristotle's explanation of the proper function of tragedy:

> A middle course!
> What hinders that we treat this tragic theme
> As the Three taught when either woke some woe,
> —How Klutaimnestra hated, what the pride
> Of Iokasté, why Medeia clove
> Nature asunder. Small rebuked by large,
> We felt our puny hates refine to air,
> Our poor prides sink, prevent the humbling hand,
> Our petty passions purify their tide.[4]

Again he writes:

> What else in life seems piteous any more
> After such pity; or proves terrible
> Beside such terror?[5]

[1] See Elizabeth Barrett, Preface to *Prometheus* (1833).
In a note on the Preface to her *Essay on Mind* (1826), she states that the author of the *Ars Poetica* is indebted to Aristotle without any loss of poetic originality.

[2] For evidence of Browning's learning, see Thurman Los Hood, *Browning's Ancient Classical Sources*, in *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 33 (1922). 79–180.

[3] Browning may have found his original conception in Plato's *Symposium*. See Carl N. Jackson, *Classical Elements in Browning's Aristophanes' Apology*, in *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 20 (1909). 15.

[4] Browning, *Aristophanes' Apology* 158–166.

[5] *Ibid.* 174–6.
Cf. *The Ring and the Book* 9.130–1:
> The very circumstance I paint,
> Moving the pity and terror of my lords.

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In *Aristophanes' Apology* Browning interprets the tragic *catharsis* as purification. There is a decided suggestion of the other interpretation, however, the notion of 'purging,' or clearing away, in *Paracelsus*:

> You are calmer now.
> This verse-making can purge you well enough
> Without the terrible penance you describe.[1]

Browning conceives of an artistic combination of the two dramatic forms, tragedy and comedy:

> Complex Poetry,
> Uniting each god-grace, including both;
> Which operant for body as for soul,
> Masters alike the laughter and the tears.[2]

This tragi-comedy moves the tragic emotions as well as tragedy does:

> The noble slaves, wise women, move as much
> Pity and terror as true tragic types.[3]

Browning here attempts to show that the qualities of both Euripides and Aristophanes unite in Shakespeare. Euripides exhibits distinct tendencies towards a new type of tragedy,[4] but Shakespeare is the one ideal tragi-comic poet.

A scholarly poet like Browning naturally would be influenced to some extent by Matthew Arnold. In the Preface (1877) to his translation of Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, Browning admits that he has in mind the teachings of Arnold:

Fortunately, the poorest translation, provided only it be faithful—though it reproduce all the artistic confusion of tenses, moods, and persons, with which the original teems—will not

[1] Browning, *Paracelsus* 4.545–7.
[2] Browning, *Aristophanes' Apology* 1473–6.
[3] *Ibid.* 2192–3. Cf. *The Ring and the Book* 12.608: 'To mirth or pity, as I move the mood.'
[4] Euripides, as the chief forerunner of modern tragic-comedy, is quoted, in *Aristophanes' Apology* 2129–30, as saying:

> 'I paint men as they are'—so runs my boast—
> 'Not as they should be.'

Cf. *Poetics* 25.1460b33–4.

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only suffice to display what an eloquent friend maintains to be the all-in-all of poetry—'the action of the piece'—but may help to illustrate his assurance that 'the Greeks are the highest models of expression, the unapproached masters of the grand style.'

Few poets, however, were further removed from the classical spirit than was Browning. To Aristotle he would seen a strangely unbalanced writer; his lyrics are usually dramatic, his dramas too often lyrical, and the *plot* in many of his poems is almost completely submerged by the philosophical *dianoia*. To Browning, the *Poetics* of Aristotle offered a few striking theories that stimulated his philosophical and poetic imagination. While he never would have sought the title of 'Aristotelian,' he was one of the few eminent English poets of the century to give serious attention to Aristotle's doctrines of poetic art.

Oscar Wilde, after distinguishing himself in classics at Trinity College, Dublin, went to Oxford prepared to enjoy not only the new aesthetics of James McNeill Whistler but also the study of Aristotle. As early as the year 1879, his essay on the *Rise of Historical Criticism*, written for a prize at Oxford, shows the influence of Aristotle's philosophy. When he wrote this essay, Wilde's main interest lay in the *Politics*, but he found occasion to mention the *Poetics* as well.[1] Later, as the chief apostle of the new aestheticism, he turned to the *Poetics*. His *Critic and Artist* (1891) lavishes praise upon that 'perfect little work of aesthetic criticism, Aristotle's *Treatise on Poetry*.'[2]

In *Critic and Artist*, Wilde easily adjusts Aristotle's theories to his own standards. Following Goethe, he rejects the long-popular moral function of tragedy in favor of, let us say, the 'spiritual' interpretation:

That purification and spiritualizing of the nature which he [Aristotle] calls κάθαρσις is, as Goethe saw, essentially aesthetic, and is not moral, as Lessing fancied.[3]

[1] See Wilde, *Complete Writings*, pub. by the Nottingham Society, 1909, 6.185, 213.
[2] *Ibid.* 7.120.
[3] *Ibid.* 7.121. Cf. Goethe, *Literary Essays*, ed. by J. E. Spingarn, New York, 1921, pp. 104–8.

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His explanation is not the modern pathological one, for he still retains the notion of 'purification'—'the word κάθαρσις having, it has sometimes seemed to me, a definite allusion to the rite of initiation, if indeed that be not, as I am occasionally tempted to fancy, its true and only meaning here.'[1]

Wilde, in connection with his aesthetic apostleship, was energetic in the renaissance of the English drama in the 'eighties and 'nineties. His plays, however, have relatively little to do with his critical theories; they are popular expressions of the new sophistication, and not of the new criticism. The leading spokesman of the dramatic renaissance was Henry Arthur Jones.

Jones was a crusader in the attempt to raise the artistic standards of English drama. The new aesthetic movement, the new experimental theatres of Paris and Berlin, the remarkable achievements in Scandinavian drama that were then coming to light in England, all worked together to stimulate English hopes that a new era in the drama was arising. Englishmen began to have visions of a new national theatre that would rival the glories of the Elizabethan stage. But the playwrights and critics of the two decades were usually practical in their methods. Jones and his fellows were not trying to establish a 'mental theatre.' Nor did they try to reconstitute Greek and Elizabethan plays. In their utterances even the familiar comparisons between Greek temples and Gothic cathedrals are eschewed; Jones says, 'If we cannot raise Gothic cathedrals, we may, however, build pleasant healthy cottages, taking care our materials and workmanship are sound.'[2] Jones himself was a man of the theatre. First of all, he believed, English playwrights must free themselves from servile imitations of foreign drama by writing successful plays

[1] Wilde, *Complete Writings* 7.122; cf. 7.174.

The other notion of *catharsis*, the so-called 'modern' interpretation, now begins to find favor with English scholars. In 1891 Arthur O. Prickard published a lecture (with two appendices), *Aristotle on the Art of Poetry*, which adopts the pathological explanation of Bernays. Cf. Bernays, *Grundzüge der verlorenen Abhandlung des Aristoteles über Wirkung der Tragödie*, in *Zwei Abhandlungen über die Aristotelische Theorie des Drama*, Berlin, 1880, pp. 1–117.

[2] Jones, *Renascence of the English Drama*, London and New York, 1895, p. 21.

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representing real English life. Jones was expedient first, and then idealistic. His recorded rules for immediate success in playwriting are, 'don't fog your audience,' and 'don't bore them'; such rules do not spring from traditional dramatic criticism, though they underlie the practice of the best playwrights. On the other hand, Jones was working for an *intellectual* drama, and he held to universal laws of good play-making that must be observed, he thought, if England was to produce plays of lasting merit. Many of Jones' theories have much in common with the doctrines of Aristotle.

In his critical essays Jones is not a realist. The drama, he asserts, should be an idealized imitation of nature, exhibiting poetic, that is, universal truth. He is modern in his emphasis upon Character rather than Plot: 'I wish you to remember that plot and story and construction should be inferior to the truthful exhibition of life and character.'[1] He agrees with Aristotle that the playwright must attend to the Plot first, but he would not agree that Plot is the soul of drama. Jones says that the 'idea, the plot, always comes first';[2] but he also says, 'I do not say the plot is the chief thing.'[3] Towards the close of his critical writing, however, he demands attention to structure:

Lastly, I exhort you to write upon the tablets of your hearts Aristotle's two main rules of play-craftsmanship, verified and confirmed for two thousand years. The plot is the *first* thing. The end—that is a definite, inevitable conclusion to which all the articulated action directs—'The end is the chief thing.'[4]

Though Jones is less of a scholar than Matthew Arnold, he has more than a historical admiration for the greatest creations of the Greek stage; he is another of the moderns who hold that *Oedipus Rex* is probably the most perfectly constructed play:

Perhaps the greatest story that was ever told on the stage, and certainly the finest example of dramatic construction, are to be

[1] Jones, *Renascence of the English Drama*, p. 254.
[2] Jones, in the *Strand Magazine* 34 (1907). 379.
[3] Jones, *The Delineation of Character in Drama* (1910), in *Foundations of a National Drama*, London, 1913, p. 189.
[4] Jones, in *Theatre Magazine* 39 (No. 282, 1924). 52.

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found in the *Oedipus Tyrannus* of Sophocles. . . . Step by step the tragic story marches to its close; every movement developing some new situation of terror and pathos.[1]

The renaissance of the English drama has been literary from the outset. Pinero, Jones, Shaw, Barrie, Galsworthy, and Granville-Barker have all been successful men of the theatre who wished to elevate English drama as literature. Jones, for example, has often aimed higher than he could reach; but he never has yielded ground to realistic methods of attracting popular attention. He has never written a great tragedy, though *Michael and his Lost Angel* is an excellent literary performance; but he has upheld the tradition of great tragedy:

'The end of tragedy,' says Aristotle in his often-quoted definition, 'is to purge the mind by moving in us pity and terror.' 'That is,' according to Milton, 'to temper and reduce these and such-like passions to just measure and a kind of *delight*.' I went to see a modern realistic tragedy. 'No,' said I at the end of it, as I tried to rally my stunned senses, and dragged myself home to continue the nightmare in my sleep. 'No! You are wrong, Aristotle. The end of tragedy is to knock us down with a dirty bludgeon.'[2]

Jones never has tolerated the substitution of show for dramatic power. Always conservative in his opinions, he is inclined to agree with Aristotle on the place of Spectacle in the theatre; he contends that the function of all stage-illusions and all other accessories is subordinate to the drama, and should be merely illustrative. To be sure, Spectacle in the theatre of the 'nineties, without the revolutionary electric light, had not yet reached such importance as it later attained; but Jones always has demanded literary excellence in a play; his contention is that the drama must improve the theatre, and dictate to it.

Literary criticism and aesthetics at the close of the century swung back towards a more formal method, and towards more

[1] Jones, *The Drama and Real Life* (1897), in *Foundations of a National Drama*, p. 149.
[2] Jones, *Renascence of the English Drama*, p. 339.

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definite standards of judgment. Aristotle began to recover some of his lost prestige, for many sensible men were growing tired of what Churton Collins called the 'dithyrambic or hysterical school of criticism.' Sufferers from the extravagant eulogies that were served up by Swinburne, and by his followers, naturally found relief in the calm, dispassionate Aristotle. As Coventry Patmore points out in one of his essays, the appreciation of the beautiful no longer fulfilled the requirements of criticism:

> It is not true, though it has so often been asserted, that criticism is of no use or of little use to art. This notion prevails so widely only because—among us at least—criticism has not been criticism. To criticize is to judge; to judge requires judicial qualification; and this is quite a different thing from a natural sensitiveness to beauty, however much that sensitiveness may have become heightened by converse with refined and beautiful objects of nature and works of art.[1]

Samuel Henry Butcher's *Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art, with a Critical Text and a Translation of the Poetics*, first issued in 1895, is a product of this return to Aristotelian criticism. Other scholars, Bywater above all, doubtless have improved upon Butcher's interpretation, but for England and America Butcher has been the modern popularizer of the *Poetics*. No other book since Twining's translation in 1789 has done as much to foster the study of Aristotle's principles of poetic art.

One of the sanest judges of critical tendencies at the close of the century was William John Courthope, author of the *History of English Poetry*, and lecturer on poetry at Oxford from 1895 to 1900. Academic though he was in his criticism, Courthope was no zealot for antiquity and Aristotle. He found Aristotle's method in the *Poetics* more valuable than the technical criticism in the treatise. If the modern reader would take the trouble to study the scientific reasoning in Aristotle's criticism, not confusing the method with the criticism itself, we should have, so Courthope believed, far less smart nonsense written about art and poetry. Courthope practised his own advice.

[1] Patmore, *Principle in Art*, London, 1898, p. 1.

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In his lecture, *Aristotle as a Critic*,[1] Courthope sides with many modern critics on the question of Plot and Character, maintaining that the action in a literary work is subordinate to the characters exhibited. On the other hand, he finds Aristotle's analysis of dramatic structure a valuable aid in judging modern composition, as, for example, in his criticism of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*:

> Never was there a more admirable δέσις, or complication of plot, in any Greek comedy; never a more well-conceived περιπέτεια, or reversal of the action, never a more satisfactory λύσις, or dénouement of the moral situation.[2]

At the end of the century Aristotle returned to literary criticism, but his followers no longer were forced to wear the 'Aristotelian yoke.' The 'rules' had disappeared. Courthope's procedure, fair to both ancient and modern writers, is typical of the best critics of the 'nineties, and is carried over with renewed force into the twentieth century. Courthope's estimate of Aristotle's powers is one that most critics of the present day would indorse:

> No critic has ever equaled him in his profound analysis of the constitution and operations of the mind of man; no critic has so felicitously illustrated the soundness of his abstract principles by concrete illustrations, drawn from the practice of great artists.[3]

[1] See Courthope, *Life in Poetry: Law in Taste*, London, 1901, pp. 190–221.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 202.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 213.

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CHAPTER VI

RECENT YEARS

The first quarter of the twentieth century witnessed, both in a scholarly and in a popular way, another revival of Aristotelian criticism. Several notable editions and translations of the *Poetics* appeared. Butcher's text, with translation and elaborate commentary, repeatedly reissued, is still valuable; Bywater's text, with commentary and translation, in 1909, is justly regarded as the standard English edition of the *Poetics*; Margoliouth's edition, in 1911, has called attention to the mediæval Arabic version; Cooper's amplified English version, published in 1913, has made the *Poetics* more intelligible to the reader who is unacquainted with classical scholarship and traditions; W. Hamilton Fyfe's edition, in 1927, is a moderately useful addition to the long list of works in the Loeb Classical Library. Schools and universities on both sides of the Atlantic have emphasized the study of the *Poetics*. In the foremost English and American universities it would be hard to find a good course in literary criticism, in poetic theory, or in dramatic structure that does not in some way use the treatise of Aristotle. The fairly numerous translations are accessible to the reading public, so that even the most popular journalistic critics of the theatre occasionally allude to the leading points of Aristotle's doctrine, knowing that a fair share of their readers will understand what is meant.

Aristotle has not regained prestige without opposition. Especially at the beginning of the century, there were controversial outbursts that rival the pitched battles in which Rymer, Dryden, Dennis, Samuel Butler, and others distinguished themselves. The London *Times Literary Supplement* in the spring of 1902

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furnishes us with one of the liveliest controversies. A writer in the *Quarterly Review*, passing judgment on Stephen Phillips' *Paolo and Francesca*, has ventured to assert that Character is the essential element of drama. Churton Collins, appealing to Aristotle, as confirmed by Lessing, and sure that the greatest dramas will support the view, insists that Plot is the essential thing, not Character. For Collins, a Dennis of the twentieth century, Aristotle's doctrine is law: 'This is the criterion which, as I need scarcely say, should be applied to all drama of classical quality.'[1] The result of Collins' attempted refutation is a spirited engagement that would have done credit to the eighteenth century. The urbane Andrew Lang, being reasonably competent in the study of Aristotle, and an admirer of him,[2] fearing that the dispute will degenerate into a vulgar brawl, enters the fray. Lang sides with neither party, but champions the cause of English liberty: 'We cannot let Aristotle—in English—ride roughshod over us. We seldom find two scholars agreed as to what Aristotle really meant.'[3] Collins, alarmed at the ascendency of critics who despise all standards or principles of judgment, retaliates with vigor. The editorial staff, in the person of Arthur Bingham Walkley, is forced to point out that, after all, Aristotle's principles, excellent as they may be, are not standards of judgment for the drama of the present day. Finally Courthope is involved. He disagrees with Collins, and denies that Plot is more important in drama than Character;[4] but he obviously prefers Aristotle's method to the lack of method favored by the 'dithyrambic' critics. Collins, probably the staunchest supporter of the *Poetics* since Dennis, loses the popular verdict, but Aristotle emerges from the trial with his reputation unimpaired.

Many of the university professors in England who deal with problems of literary criticism and the drama are upholders of

[1] Collins, in the *Times Literary Supplement*, May 9, 1902.
[2] See Aristotle's *Politics* (Books 1, 3, 4), ed. and trans. by W. E. Bolland and Andrew Lang, London, 1877; Lang, *Homer and the Epic*, London, 1893.
[3] Lang, in the *Times Literary Supplement*, May 16, 1902.
[4] See above, p. 180.

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Aristotelian doctrine. Few are as well-disposed to the ancient standards as Churton Collins used to be. In his essay, *English Literature at the Universities*, Collins writes:

> How can a teacher deal adequately even with the subject which these regulations profess to include—the history of criticism—who need have no acquaintance with the *Poetic* and *Rhetoric*, the *Treatise on the Sublime*, and the *Institutes of Oratory*?[1]

And the most important of these is the *Poetics*. Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch at Cambridge has always been a follower of Aristotle in literary criticism,[2] and takes advantage of every reasonable opportunity to introduce his students to the *Poetics*.[3] Allardyce Nicoll, to-day one of the most productive writers on dramatic theory, holds that the 'fount of all true study of the essential elements of this type of literature lies, as is well-known, in the *Poetics* of Aristotle.'[4]

Of greater public influence than university teachers are the popular writers on modern drama, the critics who frequent the theatre. Arthur Bingham Walkley, the most scholarly, and probably the best, of the journalist critics during the early part of the century, in his essays, reminds the public that Aristotle judged drama, not alone as a literary creation, but *πρὸς τὰ θέατρα*.[5] Walkley divides contemporary critics into two classes, the 'dogmatic' and the 'impressionist.' He leans towards the 'impressionist,' but is unwilling wholly to neglect ancient principles or to cast off all traditions of the drama. His aim is to become, and to help his reader to become, the ideal Aristotelian spectator, the man of cultivated taste, the expert judge, the intelligent dramatic critic.

[1] Collins, *Ephemera Critica*, Westminster, 1901, p. 67.
[2] See Quiller-Couch, *Adventures in Criticism*, New York, 1896, pp. 251–3.
[3] See Quiller-Couch, *Studies in Literature* (First Series), New York, 1918; *Studies in Literature* (Second Series), Cambridge, 1922; *On the Art of Reading*, Cambridge, 1920.
[4] Nicoll, *An Introduction to Dramatic Theory*, London, 1923, p. 11.
[5] See Walkley, *Dramatic Criticism*, London, 1903.

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Walkley did not take the technical criticism in the *Poetics* too seriously; he was a modern[1] with a sensible scepticism towards the exaggerated claim of some Aristotelians about the 'modernity' of Aristotle. Matthew Arnold, in the Preface to *Merope*, held that the laws of Greek tragic art are not exclusive: 'Traveling in a certain path, the spirit of man arrived at Greek tragedy; traveling in other paths, it may arrive at other kinds of tragedy.'[2] Yet Arnold doubted whether modern dramatists have succeeded in perfecting another form. Walkley had no such doubts: 'The spirit of man has, in fact, arrived at other kinds of tragedy, so that we must resign ourselves to the historical view of Aristotle's *Poetics*.'[3] Walkley's criticism is one of the best modern interpretations of Aristotle's principles; it presents the sensible view of Courthope; it upholds Aristotle's scientific method, but does not force the technical criticism of the *Poetics* upon modern drama.

William Archer, another humane critic of the theatre, and the author of the sanest modern manual of play-writing, found the *Poetics* extremely valuable, but not infallible for contemporary problems. In the opening pages of *Play-Making* he writes:

> There are no absolute rules, in fact, except such as are dictated by the plainest common sense. Aristotle himself did not so much dogmatize as analyze, classify, and generalize from, the practices of the Attic dramatists. He said, 'you had better' rather than 'you must.' It was Horace, in an age of deep dramatic decadence, who re-stated the pseudo-Aristotelian formulas of the Alexandrians as though they were unassailable dogmas of art.[4]

Archer, accepting Aristotle's basic principle that a play can exist without Character, never without Plot, does not, however, regard Plot as the 'noblest' element; he believes that the action in the best modern drama does, and should, exist for the sake of Character.[5] Archer sees in the modern theory of the 'great scene'

[1] See George Bernard Shaw's characterization of the Aristotelian critic, 'Trotter,' in the Induction of *Fanny's First Play*.
[2] See above, p. 169.
[3] Walkley, *Dramatic Criticism*, p. 85.
[4] Archer, *Play-Making*, London, 1912, pp. 3–4.
[5] *Ibid.*, p. 19.

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the Peripety that Aristotle demands in any well-constructed play.[1] In details Archer freely departs from the *Poetics*; in his general conception of dramatic theory he is very close to Aristotle:

> It was one of Aristotle's requirements that a play should have a beginning, middle, and end; and though it may seem that it scarcely needed an Aristotle to lay down so self-evident a proposition, the fact is that playwrights are more than sufficiently apt to ignore or despise the rule.[2]

So Archer plans his own work: Book 1, *Prologue;* Book 2, *The Beginning;* Book 3, *The Middle;* Book 4, *The End;* Book 5, *Epilogue.*

Archer's view of dramatic art is likewise representative of the best current theory. In technical, mechanical details modern critics of the theatre have radically departed from Greek dramatic art as implied in the *Poetics*; in their attempt to survey theatrical problems as a whole the moderns have returned to a point of view strikingly like Aristotle's. Aristotle thought of dramatic production in the Attic theatre as a synthesis of Plot, Character, Diction, Thought, Spectacle, and Music; all forming an artistic, organic unit; all directed by the dramatic poet—a Sophocles, for example—who is an artist of the theatre. The modern critics are agreed that the 'Art of the Theatre' to-day should be a synthesis of Play (Dialogue), Acting (including the dance), *Décor*, Lighting, Costume, and Music—all bound together by the director who should be the *artist of the theatre*. The details of theatrical production have so multiplied that the poet, the playwright, no longer can control all of them. There cannot be, or at least there is not, an Aeschylus or a Sophocles on the modern stage. The ultimate aim, however, is the same for modern as for ancient times. We are still working to create an artistic beginning, middle, and end.

In the foregoing historical sketch, cursory though it be, we have seen that Aristotle's *Poetics* has been a constant source of ideas and opinions in English literature from the Renaissance to

[1] Archer, *Play-Making*, pp. 199–209.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 67.

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the present day. Especially in criticism, and particularly in dramatic criticism, is this so. The *Poetics* has had a varying fortune, but never since its first appearance in England has it suffered total obscurity. The Aristotelian 'rules,' fostered by Italian, Dutch, French, and German critics, have been prominent in England from the very beginnings of literary criticism. Ever since Sir Philip Sidney's *Defence of Poesie*, however, the *Poetics* itself has had worthy English supporters. The poets may have slighted it; of the greatest men in English poetry only Milton stands out as a serious student of the *Poetics*; but we are safe in affirming that none of the great English critics has neglected to study the treatise in some form or other—neither Sidney, Jonson, Dryden, Addison, Fielding, Johnson, Coleridge, nor Matthew Arnold. Who can produce a serious rival to these names from the ranks of those who have scorned the 'rules' of Aristotle? Aristotle is still the master for the critic. Criticism may be on his side, as it seems to be to-day; it may be against him, as it often has been during the past four hundred years; it never can ignore him.

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THE POETICS OF ARISTOTLE IN ENGLAND

BY

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